

Wahunsonacock's Gambit: Powhatan Foreign Relations and the Success of Virginia, 1570-1622

By

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Abstract

In an effort to explain the speed with which a small band of English colonists was able to supplant the expansive and powerful Chesapeake Algonquian paramountcy of Tsenacommacah, this work asks why the leaders of the expanding and growing Powhatan Paramountcy allowed English colonists to settle within their borders at all in 1607. By situating this question within the native ground of Tsenacommacah in the early-contact period, instead of focusing on the Anglo-Powhatan Wars of the early seventeenth century, this dissertation seeks to foreground the role of indigenous decision making, politics and economics in the eventual success of Virginia. While previous works have attributed characterized the Powhatans tolerance of hostile outsiders as an indicator of Powhatan curiosity, hubris or ignorance, this work argues the decision to allow the English to stay was based in indigenous political considerations more than anything the English represented or offered.

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Introduction

Tsenacommacah, the Powhatan paramount chiefdom of the Chesapeake plain, was a new world even before the arrival of the English in 1607.¹ News of Europeans and the goods they carried filtered into the James River valley by the mid-1500s and were commonplace when Wahunsonacock, the paramount chief more commonly known by the name that more appropriately refers to his polity--Powhatan, began to expand his domains in the 1560s and 1570s.² Paramount chiefdoms such as Tsenacommacah grew in the face of threats from indigenous raiders from the north and west of the Chesapeake plain. By 1607, Wahunsonacock knew first-hand from districts in southern Tsenacommacah that both the Spanish and the English might be either promising trading partners or dangerous enemies. As an expanding paramountcy, Tsenacommacah was both surrounded by and composed of chiefdoms looking for a way out of Wahunsonacock's oversight.³ When a group of around 100 English colonists set up a permanent camp in the Paspahugh district of Tsenacommacah in 1607, they were unaware of the complex political, military and diplomatic world that surrounded them. Luckily for those colonists, the Powhatan leader, confident in his superiority over the English, worried that the prestige goods and guns they carried might fall into the hands of some of his indigenous rivals. Indeed, indigenous politics, not English grit or even English violence induced Wahunsonacock to allow the English to stay in Tsenacommacah. The paramount chief tolerated the newcomers because, in

¹ Tsenacommacah was one of many "new worlds" that emerged in the wake of European contact. See: James H. Merrell, *The Indians' New World: Catawbas and Their Neighbors from European Contact through the Era of Removal* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1989).

² Referring to the Powhatan paramount chief by his familiar name, Wahunsonacock, avoids confusion when discussing both the Powhatan people and Powhatan the man.

³ James D. Rice, "Escape from Tsenacommacah: Chesapeake Algonquians and the Powhatan Menace," in *The Atlantic World and Virginia, 1550-1624*, ed. Peter C. Mancall (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 106-09; Helen C. Rountree, *The Powhatan Indians of Virginia: Their Traditional Culture* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1989), 117.

the increasingly globalized world of 1607 Virginia, he calculated it was too dangerous to risk that the English might ally with one of his *real* threats.

This dissertation attempts to re-insert an element of contingency into the indigenous history of early-contact Virginia. Jamestown survived largely because Wahunsonacock misunderstood the designs for permanent English settlement and, as a result, permitted it to survive. Moreover, the paramount chief rooted his decisions in an indigenous world where violence was a common political tool often used to direct subordinate chiefdoms. Wahunsonacock's gambit was allowing the English to stay while he tried to bring them to heel as a subordinate district of Tsenacommacah; his failure was in underestimating how willing the English were to sacrifice the lives of their countrymen in an effort to make Jamestown work. Frederick Gleach argues convincingly that the early Anglo-Powhatan relationship was characterized by attempts on both sides to "bring the other to civility."⁴ While Gleach's assessment is useful, the term "civility" glosses the fact that both the English and Powhatans sought to *force* the other to civility as well as to submission.

In an increasingly globalized world, it is tempting to look for a time and place where distinct frontier lines separated alien peoples and cultures. Early-contact Virginia seems to offer such a meeting of cultures and peoples. Upon closer inspection, however, the early-seventeenth-century encounters between Powhatans and Englishmen in the Chesapeake Bay took place in an interconnected and heterogeneous world where each side's knowledge of the other was limited, but not absent. Wahunsonacock's knowledge of Europeans left him with a choice when English

⁴ Frederic W. Gleach, *Powhatan's World and Colonial Virginia: A Conflict of Cultures* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1997), 3.

colonists arrived in Tsenacommacah and began to trade with nearby people from what appeared to be a permanent settlement on the James River. Europeans sometimes brought useful things like iron and copper, but they came in ships equipped with deadly cannons and sometimes killed or kidnapped anyone they lured aboard. Wahunsonacock likely considered killing the English outright, but the lure of English trade goods, and indeed the lure of their cannons, proved too strong. Archaeologists and ethnohistorians point out that paramount chiefdoms such as Tsenacommacah were constantly in danger of collapse due to the fact that they relied on unstable trade networks and imported prestige goods to maintain their authority.⁵ Wahunsonacock found the English in Jamestown dis-organized, hungry and, paradoxically, well-supplied with prestige goods. Faced with such low-hanging fruit, the Powhatan paramount chief felt he had to try to control the English trade and incorporate them into Tsenacommacah.

Definitions and Explanations

Defining who was and was not a Powhatan in the tidewater Chesapeake is difficult. Some scholars gloss all the Algonquian-speaking peoples of the Chesapeake tidewater together under the blanket term "Powhatan," as the peoples who lived there shared a similar culture that combined northern Algonquian language and culture with that of the large paramountcies of the protohistorical southeastern United States. Lumping all the indigenous peoples of the greater Chesapeake together as Powhatans oversimplifies the complex political landscape of early seventeenth-century Virginia and tends to obfuscate the indigenous world of Tsenacommacah.

⁵ Timothy Earle, "Chiefdoms in Archaeological and Ethnohistorical Perspective," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 16(1987): 281, 97; Rita Smith Kipp and Edward M Schortman, "The Political Impact of Trade in Chiefdoms," *American Anthropologist* 91, no. 2 (June 1989): 371-72; Daniel K. Richter, "Tsenacommacah and the Atlantic World," in *The Atlantic World and Virginia, 1550-1624*, ed. Peter C. Mancall (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 33.

Use of the blanket term Powhatan also reflects an English colonial effort to simplify the complex landscape they found in Virginia. By imposing an imagined, shared government and ethnic identity on all the indigenous peoples of the Chesapeake plain, English colonists made the task of negotiation and trade easier for themselves.⁶ Moreover, Wahunsonacock may have encouraged this behavior by overstating his authority over distant chiefdoms only loosely affiliated with Tsenacommacah in an attempt to overawe the English.⁷ “Wahunsonacock’s Gambit” seeks to correct the tendency to oversimplify the indigenous landscape of the Chesapeake plain. Because this work appreciates the fragile and composite nature of political authority in Tsenacommacah, those chiefdoms outside or on the fringes of Tsenacommacah are given their anglicized names whenever possible. Likewise, to prevent confusion, the blanket term Powhatan applies only to those peoples who were either at the unquestionable cultural and political heart of Tsenacommacah or undeniably working under the orders of Wahunsonacock or his successors.⁸

The paramount chiefdom of Tsenacommacah is often described as either a confederacy or an empire, though both terms are misleading. Thomas Jefferson first used the term “confederacy” to describe the political organization of the Powhatans as a voluntary union of chiefdoms and his appellation stuck despite its inaccuracy.⁹ Tsenacommacah was certainly not a confederacy, because for most of the chiefdoms within Tsenacommacah membership was coerced, not voluntary. Modern authors who adopted the confederacy model were often either

⁶ Francis Jennings, *The Invasion of America: Indians, Colonialism, and the Cant of Conquest* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1975), 114-16.

⁷ Martin D. Gallivan, "Powhatan's Werowocomoco: Constructing Place, Polity, and Personhood in the Chesapeake, C.E. 1200-C.E. 1609," *American Anthropologist* 109, no. 1 (2007): 94-95.

⁸ The political heart of Tsenacommacah was composed of those chiefdoms on the York River that Wahunsonacock inherited at his accession to the paramountcy: the Pamunkey, Powhatan, Arrohattoc, Youghtanud, Appomattock, and Mattaponi.

⁹ J. Frederick Fausz, "The Powhatan Uprising of 1622 : A Historical Study of Ethnocentrism and Cultural Conflict" (Thesis, College of William and Mary., 1977), 68-69.

unwilling to accept the notion that the Powhatans possessed the capability to operate a large-scale, complex paramount chiefdom or uncomfortable with highlighting the coercive tactics of Tsenacommacah. English observers of Tsenacommacah in the seventeenth century described it as an empire, and its werowances (or chiefs) as kings. In many ways, Tsenacommacah did resemble an empire.¹⁰ The Powhatan paramountcy was ruled by a paramount chief who expanded his territory militarily, conquering and demanding tribute from neighboring peoples. Tribute flowed upwards from the werowances of individual towns to district werowances to the mamanatowick, or paramount chief. In exchange, authority in the form of political, economic and spiritual power traveled downwards, mostly in the form of prestige goods such as copper.¹¹ The paramount chief in Tsenacommacah could relocate entire chiefdoms and held the power of life and death over his subjects.

While Tsenacommacah shared many characteristics of imperial organization, it was not an empire. Rather, it attempted to convert its conquered peoples into Powhatans, both politically and culturally. Imperial organization is usually composed of hierarchically distinct peoples who retain their cultural customs and ethnic identities after inclusion within the empire.¹² Before the arrival of the English in 1607, Wahunsonacock sought to build a distinct, homogenous, Powhatan identity, uniting the disparate Algonquian peoples of the Chesapeake plain.¹³ Tsenacommacah may have become an empire, had Wahunsonacock been successful in his

¹⁰ James Axtell calls Tsenacommacah an empire. James Axtell, "The Rise and Fall of the Powhatan Empire," in *After Columbus: Essays in the Ethnohistory of Colonial North America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988).

¹¹ Richter, "Tsenacommacah and the Atlantic World," 32-35.

¹² Jane Burbank and Frederick Cooper, *Empires in World History: Power and the Politics of Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), 8-9; Philip Pomper, "The History and Theory of Empires," *History and Theory* 44, no. 4 (December 2005): 1-2.

¹³ Helen C. Rountree, *Pocahontas's People: The Powhatan Indians of Virginia through Four Centuries* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1990), 11; *The Powhatan Indians of Virginia: Their Traditional Culture*, 13.

attempt to extend his authority over the English at Jamestown who needed to retain their distinctiveness to remain useful as a district of Tsenacommacah.

This dissertation examines Tsenacommacah from the protohistoric period of sporadic European contact beginning in the mid sixteenth-century through the Powhatan coup of 1622. This periodization coincides with the era of Tsenacommacah's dominance of the Chesapeake plain. Following the example of anthropologist Frederick Gleach, this work uses the term "coup" to refer to the Powhatan attacks of 1622 instead of the more common "massacre." The coup of 1622 was not a massacre from the perspective of the Powhatans, who carried out their attack with specific purpose. Moreover, as the following will argue, the attack was not intended to eliminate or force the English out of Virginia. As Gleach points out, the oft-used term "uprising" is equally problematic because it suggests the Powhatans saw themselves as a subordinate people rising against their oppressors. On the contrary, the coup of 1622 was designed to force the English into their proper, subordinate place within Tsenacommacah, not to remove them from a position of dominance.¹⁴

This work necessarily relies most heavily on the professional and personal records of Europeans involved in the exploration and colonization of the Chesapeake from the mid-1500s through 1622. Interpreting surviving records within the cultural context of both the English authors and their indigenous neighbors helps to limit anachronistic interpretation of these limited sources.¹⁵ This dissertation also relies on ethnohistorical methods, using evidence from the archaeological record, ethnography, and oral tradition to re-examine traditional historical texts to

¹⁴ Gleach, *Powhatan's World and Colonial Virginia: A Conflict of Cultures*, 4.

¹⁵ Karen Ordahl Kupperman, *Indians and English : Facing Off in Early America* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2000), x.

create a more nuanced understanding of the past where sources are scant.¹⁶ Much recent history about colonial Virginia focuses on the ties between Virginia and the wider Atlantic world.¹⁷ Atlantic world historians such as David Armitage, Alison Games, and April Hatfield, argue that understanding early Virginia requires considering its transatlantic, colonial and international context. While the notion of an Atlantic world is commendable for including the perspectives of Africans and indigenous peoples, as well as moving colonial history beyond provincial and nationalistic perspectives, such a vantage privileges the viewpoints of those Europeans who, after all, did the work of tying the Atlantic world together.¹⁸ As Daniel Richter points out, the aim of good American Indian history should be to, “reorient our perspective on the continent’s past to alternate between the general and the personal, and to outline stories of North America during the period of European colonization rather than of the European colonization of North America.”¹⁹ This dissertation attempts to answer Richter’s call to move beyond traditional interpretations of the Powhatans of the Chesapeake plain as reactive members of an unchanging and static culture to present the dynamic response of a burgeoning indigenous empire faced with an English invasion.²⁰

¹⁶ For more on Ethnohistory, see: Bruce Trigger, "Ethnohistory: Problems and Prospects," *Ethnohistory* 29, no. 1 (1982); James Axtell, "The Ethnohistory of Early America," *William and Mary Quarterly* 35, no. 1 (1978).

¹⁷ Alison Games, "Atlantic History: Definitions, Challenges, Adn Opportunities," *The American Historical Review* 111, no. 3 (June 2006); David Armitage and M. J. Braddick, *The British Atlantic World, 1500-1800* (Basingstoke, Hampshire ; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002); Rice, "Escape from Tsenacommacah: Chesapeake Algonquians and the Powhatan Menace; Daniel K. Richter, "Tsenacommacah and the Atlantic World," *ibid.*, ed. Peter C. Mancall; April Lee Hatfield, *Atlantic Virginia : Intercolonial Relations in the Seventeenth Century* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004).

¹⁸ Amy Turner Bushnell, "Indigenous America and the Limits of the Atlantic World, 1493-1825," in *Atlantic History: A Critical Appraisal*, ed. Jack P. Greene and Phillip D. Morgan (New York: 2009).

¹⁹ Daniel K. Richter, *Facing East from Indian Country: A Native History of Early America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001), 9.

²⁰ The work of anthropologist Helen Rountree is perhaps the most important place to begin a discussion of the ethnohistory of the Powhatans, her two works of cultural anthropology and ethnohistory, *The Powhatan Indians of Virginia: their Traditional Culture* (1989) and *Pocahontas's People: The Powhatan Indians of Virginia through Four Centuries* (1990) are the starting point for any history of the indigenous peoples of the Chesapeake. Other

Tsenacommacah's status as a relatively new and expanding polity influenced how it engaged with its indigenous neighbors and European newcomers. Chapter one provides some background into the native ground of Tsenacommacah and its neighbors before European contact. The large, coerced chiefdoms encountered by Spanish explorers in the sixteenth century were rare in the Eastern Woodlands by the seventeenth century. In an increasingly decentralized indigenous world, Wahunsonacock managed to build a paramount chiefdom of 15,000 people that approached, even if it never achieved, the "empire" English visitors claimed it was.²¹ In exchange for prestige goods that served as tangible representations of spiritual and temporal power, the paramount chief could command dozens of districts and thousands of warriors with whom he expanded the borders of his domains and brought more distant chiefdoms under his authority.²² Through a blend of hereditary authority, spiritual power, reciprocal exchange relationships with subordinate chieftains, diplomacy, and violence, Wahunsonacock maintained his authority within its borders.

At the turn of the seventeenth century, Tsenacommacah was a relatively new polity surrounded by indigenous challengers from without and within. Trade networks vital to

important works include: *Helen C. Rountree and E. Randolph Turner III, Before and after Jamestown : Virginia's Powhatans and Their Predecessors, Native Peoples, Cultures, and Places of the Southeastern United States* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2002); *Stephen R. Potter, Commoners, Tribute, and Chiefs : The Development of Algonquian Culture in the Potomac Valley* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1993); *James Axtell, The Rise and Fall of the Powhatan Empire: Indians in Seventeenth-Century Virginia* (Williamsburg: The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, 1995); *Martin D. Gullivan, James River Chiefdoms : The Rise of Social Inequality in the Chesapeake* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2003).

²¹ English men fresh from the Irish campaigns were ill-suited to diplomacy and tried to force the titles and political demarcations of Europe on the Indians they encountered in Virginia, naming an emperor and was less complicated than dealing with several semi-independent werowances. While the title emperor was applied to several chieftains Europeans encountered who would certainly not qualify, Wahunsonacock was as close as any European was likely to find along the East Coast in the early seventeenth century. James H. Merrell, ""The Customes of Our Countrey:" Indians and Colonists in Early America," in *Strangers within the Realm: Cultural Margins of the First British Empire*, ed. Bernard Bailyn and Philip D. Morgan (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991), 138.

²² Tsenacommacah was perhaps the largest indigenous polity on the East Coast of North America in 1607, linguistic scholars translate the name as "densely inhabited land" or "close together house-site."

Tsenacommacah's political and spiritual connectivity also connected Tsenacommacah with other indigenous peoples hundreds of miles away who were sometimes trading partners and sometimes enemies. While Wahunsonacock attempted to instill a Powhatan identity throughout his domains, his authority decreased as one travelled farther from the center of his power along the York River basin. Recently conquered, outer districts of Tsenacommacah were often only-partially included in Tsenacommacah and were eager to escape Powhatan subjugation.²³ Moreover, Tsenacommacah was surrounded by indigenous enemies, including the Iroquoian-speaking Massawomecks to the north and Siouan-speaking Monacans to the west. By examining how Wahunsonacock engaged with indigenous rivals and administered Tsenacommacah, this chapter situates the Powhatans within a contested, native ground, and argues that indigenous rivals, both within and beyond Tsenacommacah profoundly influenced how Wahunsonacock engaged with the English when they arrived in 1607.

Despite their preoccupation with indigenous politics, the Powhatans were not particularly surprised when the English arrived in 1607. Since the mid-sixteenth century, tales of Europeans had travelled along with trade goods into Tsenacommacah, and European ships sailed deep into the Chesapeake with some frequency. Chapter two moves beyond Tsenacommacah's native ground and situates it within a burgeoning Atlantic world. Historians tend to use the classification "Atlantic world" to suggest that they have an appreciation for the various reciprocal relationships among European, African and indigenous peoples that have been too often left out of imperial or national histories.²⁴ Even so, most work on the Atlantic world focuses, perhaps necessarily, on the

²³ Rice, "Escape from Tsenacommacah: Chesapeake Algonquians and the Powhatan Menace."

²⁴ Bushnell, "Indigenous America and the Limits of the Atlantic World, 1493-1825; Peter C. Mancall, *The Atlantic World and Virginia, 1550-1624* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 2-8; April Lee Hatfield, *Atlantic Virginia: Intercolonial Relations in the Seventeenth Century* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania

Europeans who actively connected that world through trade. This chapter seeks to reestablish the Powhatans as proactive in seeking to control, rather than accommodate or resist, the formation of an Atlantic world.²⁵

The Powhatans of the Chesapeake plain were aware that they lived on the edge of an Atlantic world even before the English arrived in the fall of 1607. Tracing Powhatan interactions with Europeans throughout the protohistoric period, this chapter establishes Tsenacommacah as particularly familiar with Europeans years before the Jamestown colonists arrived.

Wahunsonacock knew, for example, that Europeans were showing up along the banks of his people's rivers with increasing regularity, and he knew that they were sometimes at odds with one another.²⁶ He knew that Englishmen visited his neighbors the Chesapeakes in the winter of 1585-1586, spending the winter and bringing impressive trade goods. Even earlier, in 1570, Spanish Jesuits attempted a settlement of missionaries in Tsenacommacah that ended violently. By 1607, there also must have been countless un-documented European visitors: pirates, shipwreck survivors, fishermen, and others. Once English colonists arrived in 1607, the Powhatans engaged with them actively, sending diplomats, warriors, spies, and even young girls to the English in an effort to find out what the foreigners wanted, where they came from, their

Press, 2004); Alison Games, *The Web of Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008); "Atlantic History: Definitions, Challenges, and Opportunities," *American Historical Review* 111, no. 3 (June 2006); L.H. Roper, *The English Empire in America, 1602-1658: Beyond Jamestown*, ed. Tony Ballantyne, et al., vol. 7, *Empires in Perspective* (London: Pickering & Chatto Limited, 2009); Michael Leroy Oberg, *Dominion and Civility: English Imperialism and Native America, 1585-1685* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1999).

²⁵ Bushnell, "Indigenous America and the Limits of the Atlantic World, 1493-1825," 194.

²⁶ This is particularly remarkable given that to indigenous eyes, the two Europeans nations had only almost imperceptible differences of language and confessional identity. In 1610, a Spanish spy in Virginia, Francisco Magnel noted that Wahunsonacock knew from indigenous informants that the Europeans to the extreme south were Spanish. Francisco Magnel, "Report of What Francis Magnel, an Irishman, Learned in the State of Virginia During the Eight Months That He Was There, 1 July 1610," in *Jamestown Narratives: Eyewitness Accounts of the Virginia Colony*, ed. Edward Wright Haile (Champlain, VA: Roundhouse, 1998 [1610]).

strengths and weaknesses, and how long they intended to stay. Tsenacommacah was a proactive political entity that sent out ambassadors and trade representatives, not just to Jamestown, but to the capitals of Europe in an effort to learn and establish its place in an increasingly interconnected Atlantic world. By highlighting how aware the Powhatans were in 1607 of the larger Atlantic context, this chapter seeks to establish Wahunsonacock's interest in reaping the benefits of constant European contact.

As the *mamanatowick* of the Powhatan paramount chiefdom, Wahunsonacock found the European trade more enticing than did leaders of smaller indigenous polities because access to foreign goods buttressed his authority in Tsenacommacah. Chapter three examines the role of trade and prestige goods in Tsenacommacah's intertwined economic, political, religious and diplomatic relations, both foreign and domestic. Wahunsonacock tied his paramountcy together by controlling trade networks and redistributing prestige goods among his *werowances*. Prestige goods embodied and conveyed something of their origin to the possessor, whether that origin was a distant place or a supernatural force. Simply possessing such prestige goods conveyed the spiritual power associated with these places/forces to the holder and, equally important, demonstrated the possessor's ability to obtain these goods. Whatever power created the prestige goods – foreigners, deities, etc. – could be controlled, to some extent, by the new possessor.²⁷ Before the arrival of the English, indigenous copper and shell-beads were the most important prestige goods in Tsenacommacah, and these were obtained through indigenous trade routes stretching for hundreds of miles. With the English came new sources of copper and glass beads. While Wahunsonacock initially hoped to control this new font of prestige goods in

²⁷ Richter, "Tsenacommacah and the Atlantic World," 33.

Tsenacommacah, the flood of English copper quickly diminished its power as a prestige good, potentially eroding the paramount chief's authority.

This chapter argues that Wahunsonacock allowed the English to remain in his domain when he might have easily expelled or killed them because he wanted to control the prestige goods they brought and, perhaps more importantly, to keep English goods out of the hands of his indigenous rivals. The Powhatan mamanatowick attempted to monopolize the English trade by trying to re-locate the English into the heart of Tsenacommacah, discouraging their explorations, and limiting their exposure to his indigenous rivals. He reckoned that controlling the English trade was better than forcing them out or killing them, actions that might push the English to trade with his indigenous rivals.

Wahunsonacock's monopolization effort soon proved a failure. Hungry English colonists traded copper with commoners as well as elites in an effort to feed themselves. As a result, copper lost much of its coercive and spiritual power. English beads, however, did not push out locally made shell-beads in the same way. While English copper could be molded into familiar shapes and styles, English beads were less malleable and so less powerful and appealing, despite their foreign origins. As the value of English copper and beads diminished, Wahunsonacock still did not move to expel or exterminate the English. This chapter concludes by arguing that the paramount chief's decision to continue to tolerate the English even as their trade goods declined in value reflects his appreciation of both the wider Atlantic and the indigenous world in which he lived. Whatever their offenses, the English possessed guns, and Wahunsonacock could not risk forcing the English into an alliance with his indigenous rivals. For Tsenacommacah, the English were incredibly dangerous, but only if they had indigenous help; otherwise they struggled even

to feed themselves. The promise of English guns kept the Powhatans tolerant of the English despite their violence and demands for food.

From an English perspective, the early years of Jamestown were marked with sporadic, seemingly random violence. That violence becomes both rational and precise when we consider it as a political tool wielded by a growing indigenous paramountcy aware of its place on the fringes of an Atlantic world. From this vantage, the violence that is often labeled the “First Anglo-Powhatan War” was really an attempt by Wahunsonacock to discipline and incorporate - or at least isolate - the unruly English within Tsenacommacah.²⁸ Chapter four argues that most of the violence perpetrated by the Powhatans was designed to limit English exploration and prevent the English from making alliances with enemies of Tsenacommacah. Wahunsonacock had the manpower to remove the English from his domains if he wished and there is evidence that he was not squeamish about ordering the extermination of entire chiefdoms. Powhatan violence was limited in scope then because the paramount chief designed it to discipline and contain the English, not remove or expel them.

Opechancanough’s surprise coup of 1622 is often cited as the opening salvo in a noble, and remarkably violent, campaign to preserve Powhatan culture and religion in danger from English cultural imperialism. This chapter argues the so-called Second Anglo-Powhatan War was a continuation of the First Anglo-Powhatan War with the same economic and political roots.

²⁸ Frederick Gleach points out that referring to the “Anglo-Powhatan Wars” is problematic because it assumes a euro-centric dichotomy of peace and war. In Tsenacommacah, the use of violence did not always preclude a state of peace and using the term “First Anglo-Powhatans War” to refer to the mixture of violence and negotiation that marked the early 1610s privileges a European understanding of the word. Instead of war in the European sense, the violence of the 1610s was part of Wahunsonacock’s plan to prevent the English from expanding their settlements and making contacts and trade deals with indigenous rivals, without completely exterminating the English settlement. Gleach, *Powhatan's World and Colonial Virginia: A Conflict of Cultures*, 5.

By suggesting that the conflict that began in 1622 was unconnected, historians give too much credit to the influence of English colonial culture on the chiefdoms of Tsenacommacah.

Economics and politics forced the Powhatans to violence. English goods, particularly guns, proved an impossible diplomatic problem for Wahunsonacock and Opechancanough who could neither tolerate the English as an unruly district within Tsenacommacah, nor risk driving the English away to trade with their enemies.

Prior to 1622, one Powhatan solution to the problem of obtaining English goods was to exploit the disaffected English runaways who sought refuge in Powhatan towns. Chapter five argues that Powhatan werowances tolerated English runaways not as a matter of course, but only when they were useful. Contemporary historiography often assumes that running away was always a potential strategy for unsatisfied colonists seeking to reject the burden imposed by their colonial masters, at least until increasing warfare and racism made life among the nearby indigenous peoples inconceivable for most colonists. On the contrary, it was Powhatan rejection, not English ethnocentrism, which prevented a serious defection problem in early Jamestown.

This chapter begins with a discussion of rank-and-file English colonial attitudes towards life among the Powhatans and finds that most English colonists imagined life among the Indians much easier than their own existence. For many rank-and-file colonists, life among the Powhatans seemed to offer relief from the hunger, labor, and fear that characterized life within James Fort. Average Powhatans on the other hand found little to admire in the English camp. Other than “things,” the English possessed little the Powhatans coveted. By looking closely at several case studies of English runaways, a surprising pattern emerges. Despite the presumption that running away was always an option, and that Powhatans were always ready to include English defectors, only those English colonists who were very young or useful in acquiring

English trade goods were allowed to stay for long. From the perspective of their Powhatan hosts, most runaways were unappealing candidates for adoption. Unskilled, starving young men who knew nothing of Powhatan life were a burden not a boon. Indeed, this chapter suggests it was Powhatan refusal, not English ethnocentrism, which kept large numbers of English colonists from seeking a new life among the Powhatans. English colonists largely stopped running away after the Powhatan coup of 1622 and hardened their attitudes about their indigenous neighbors. Still, projecting post-1622 attitudes backwards onto the colonists who ran away obscures a more complex picture of Anglo-Powhatan relations in early Virginia.

In sum, Wahunsonacock's gambit was his attempt to control the English colonists who invaded Tsenacommacah in 1607. Informed by his previous experience with Europeans, the Powhatan paramount chief assessed the indigenous political situation within and surrounding Tsenacommacah and concluded that it was too dangerous to expel or withdraw from the English presence in his paramountcy. Unfortunately for Wahunsonacock, English copper flowed too quickly, eroding his authority and leaving him in an impossible diplomatic position. Unwilling to risk allowing English trade goods, particularly guns, to fall into the hands of his enemies, Wahunsonacock, and his successor Opechancanough, were forced to continue their attempts to force the English into a subject position within Tsenacommacah until it was too late. These attempts at control, culminating in the Powhatan coup of 1622, reflected the precarious position of indigenous rulers who were all-too-well aware that they were caught between a native ground and an Atlantic world.

Chapter 1: Pre-Contact Virginia and the New World of Tsenacommacah

Before the 1970s, most American readers saw the struggle of early Virginia as a triumphant story of success pulled from the jaws of defeat by men of destiny like John Smith. Modern readers are generally less impressed with such men of destiny and might wonder why the Powhatans did not simply kill the rag-tag bunch at Jamestown at any of a dozen different points. The answer to this question is often presented in a dissatisfying way. Either the Powhatans did not realize the danger, or they realized it too late. Both explanations give the Powhatans far too little credit as statesmen or judges of character. This chapter contends that the Powhatan leaders, far from not realizing the danger that came with the arrival of Englishmen, acted in a more complicated political setting and with *better* knowledge than is often presumed. The Powhatan paramount chief's actions towards the English interlopers had more to do with how he viewed the native ground in the Chesapeake, and less to do with the actions of bold Englishmen like John Smith.¹ Wahunsonacock realized that the English were potentially powerful allies, and that limited his options. He could simply kill them, but then he would miss out on the copper and other trade goods they offered. He could ignore them, an action that might effectively kill them, or might drive them to ally with his nearby indigenous enemies or with a lesser werowance within his own paramountcy who might challenge his authority. In the end, he decided to attempt control. Control was a dangerous game, and he played it as long as he could,

¹ The term "native ground" is drawn from the work of Kathleen Duvall. Much like the Quapaws and Osages in Duvall's work, this work contends that the Powhatans were a relatively new polity and that they were not interested in constructing fair, "middle grounds" with the English. Instead they came from a position of power and sought to "set the terms of engagement" with the newly arrived English. Kathleen DuVal, *The Native Ground : Indians and Colonists in the Heart of the Continent*, Early American Studies (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), 5.

through trying to move the English settlement, trying to keep the English confined to their settlement, or trying to keep them weak but still willing to trade. While much has been made of the English efforts to stay alive in the first few years in Virginia, the more interesting story from this era was one of an indigenous ruler on the rise, using tools he had developed as a successful chief in a native ground and on the fringes of an Atlantic world to keep the English weak, under his protection/dominion, and trading with him and no one else. This chapter draws on ethnohistorical and archaeological sources to trace the origins of the Powhatan realm of Tsenacommacah and gives some background into the political, economic, and spiritual situation in Virginia when the English arrived in 1607.

Understanding how the Powhatan paramount chiefdom of Tsenacommacah came into existence sheds some light onto the Powhatan world that the English encountered in 1607. The most important fact about Tsenacommacah in 1607 was its newness – many of its residents remembered a time when they lived outside Wahunsonacock's domain. Paramount chiefdoms in general were rare in the coastal plain. The Powhatans emerged in the late-sixteenth-century Chesapeake because of some permutation of the following factors: increasing population growth, probably due to a recent shift towards more intensive agriculture, climactic change, external military pressures, and increased long-distance trade and warfare.² Whatever historical forces led to the origins of Tsenacommacah, it was uniquely centralized for its time and place, and that owed something to its paramount chief. Most Algonquin speakers on the east coast, and indeed most people north of Mexico, had abandoned their large, coerced chiefdoms in favor of loosely

² Rice, "Escape from Tsenacommacah: Chesapeake Algonquians and the Powhatan Menace," 101-02; Potter, *Commoners, Tribute, and Chiefs : The Development of Algonquian Culture in the Potomac Valley*, 138-45, 70-73; E. Randolph Turner, "Native American Protohistoric Interactions in the Powhatan Core Area," in *Powhatan Foreign Relations: 1500-1722*, ed. Helen C. Rountree (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1993).

organized confederacies. In an increasingly de-centralized indigenous world, Wahunsonacock somehow managed to build a paramount chiefdom of 15,000 people that approached, even if it never achieved the “empire” English visitors imagined.³

The pre-contact Virginians are difficult to characterize because they shared cultural and social characteristics of New England Algonquian and Southeastern Mississippian cultures. In the Southeast, Mississippian chiefdoms tended to develop near the fall line, where the coastal plain meets the piedmont. Living near such ecotones, the resources of both biomes could be exploited. Like Algonquin speakers farther north, the Powhatans lived on the coastal plain, while most Southeastern Mississippian polities were above or on the fall line. Along most of the eastern coast of the United States, the poorly drained soils of the coastal plains are less desirable for farmers and the forests are predominantly pine, which is less desirable for gathering peoples. In Virginia, however, the coastal plain is well drained by the myriad rivers that flow into the Chesapeake and the land supports a deciduous forest full of mast trees, a desirable food source for animals and humans.⁴ Supported by fertile soil and tidal estuaries, the Virginia coastal plain was well suited to human life, and the indigenous population grew steadily in the 1500s.⁵

While the Powhatans began to consolidate in the late sixteenth century, they never reached the same heights as their Mississippian neighbors to the south. The failure of the

³ English men fresh from the Irish campaigns were ill-suited to diplomacy and tried to force the titles and political demarcations of Europe on the Indians they encountered in Virginia, naming an emperor and was less complicated than dealing with several semi-independent werowances. While European applied the title emperor to several chieftains who certainly not qualify in the European sense, Wahunsonacock was as close as any European was likely to find along the East Coast in the early seventeenth century. Merrell, ""The Customes of Our Countrey:"" Indians and Colonists in Early America," 138.

⁴ Helen C. Rountree and E. Randolph Turner III, "On the Fringe of the Southeast: The Powhatan Paramount Chiefdom in Virginia," in *The Forgotten Centuries: Indians and Europeans in the American South, 1521-1704*, ed. Charles Hudson and Carmen Chaves Tesser (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1994), 356.

⁵ Ibid.

Powhatan to develop into a full-scale Mississippian chiefdom may have owed to its distance from the nearest Mississippian center, or perhaps because the internal and external pressures that might have caused consolidation came late or only indirectly. The Powhatans were also a more complex, higher-order society than the Iroquois to their north, though they rose and collapsed in quick order.⁶ The quick rise and fall of Tsenacommacah was characteristic of chiefdoms generally. Daniel Richter notes, paramount chiefdoms “perched a fine line between slipping ‘back’ into less hierarchical forms or moving “forward” toward the coercive apparatus of a state while “cycling” between periods of centralization and decentralization. As a result, as social forms, they were forever in flux.”⁷

The quick rise and collapse of the Powhatan paramount chiefdom leads some scholars to argue that it was the presence of Europeans that stimulated the formation of Tsenacommacah.⁸ This is something of an overstatement. Wahunsonacock and the Powhatans were certainly aware of the English and the Spanish well before the *Susan Constant* arrived on the James River in 1607. It is easy to imagine the Powhatan at English contact as an isolated, easily amazed people, but that approach makes Europeans the prime-movers in an area where they were not. Europeans were *allowed* to live on the fringes of Tsenacommacah, a complex and evolving native ground where the people had relationships and military struggles with other indigenous polities far beyond the area under their control, and who by 1607 were very aware of the larger world beyond the Atlantic Ocean. While the foundations of Tsenacommacah were almost entirely

⁶ Turner, "Native American Protohistoric Interactions in the Powhatan Core Area." Rountree and III, "On the Fringe of the Southeast: The Powhatan Paramount Chiefdom in Virginia," 368.

⁷ Richter, "Tsenacommacah and the Atlantic World," 33.

⁸ Christian F. Feest, "Virginia Algonquians," in *Northeast* ed. Bruce G. Trigger, *Handbook of North American Indians* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution, 1978), 261-62.

autochthonous, awareness of transient Europeans, even before the arrival of the English in 1607 certainly contributed to Wahunsonacock's success.⁹ Moreover, once the English arrived and began to define themselves in opposition to the "Powhatan Empire," they shaped how the Powhatans thought of themselves.¹⁰ Even before the arrival of the English in 1607, Wahunsonacock knew that European interlopers sometimes took neighboring peoples captive on their ships. He also knew that Europeans possessed trade goods that might change the balance of power in the Chesapeake.¹¹ Europeans acted more as catalysts of change than as a wholly new and unexpected variable. For the Powhatans, the arrival of a small trading colony on the James River was only one element in a sea of changing political alliances and volatile intercultural relationships.

Wahunsonacock/Mamanatowick/Powhatan

Wahunsonacock was born sometime in the mid-sixteenth century into the ruling family of what was already a small paramount chiefdom centered on the James River. From his mother, Wahunsonacock inherited the rule of six chiefdoms: Pamunkey, Youghthanund, and Mattaponi in the York River drainage and Powhatan, Arrohatexk, and Appamattuck in the upper James River basin near the fall line.¹² The fall line also marked the dividing line between the Algonquian-speaking peoples of the coastal plain and the frequently hostile Siouan-speaking Monacans of the

⁹ Turner, "Native American Protohistoric Interactions in the Powhatan Core Area," 93. For more on this awareness see Chapter 2.

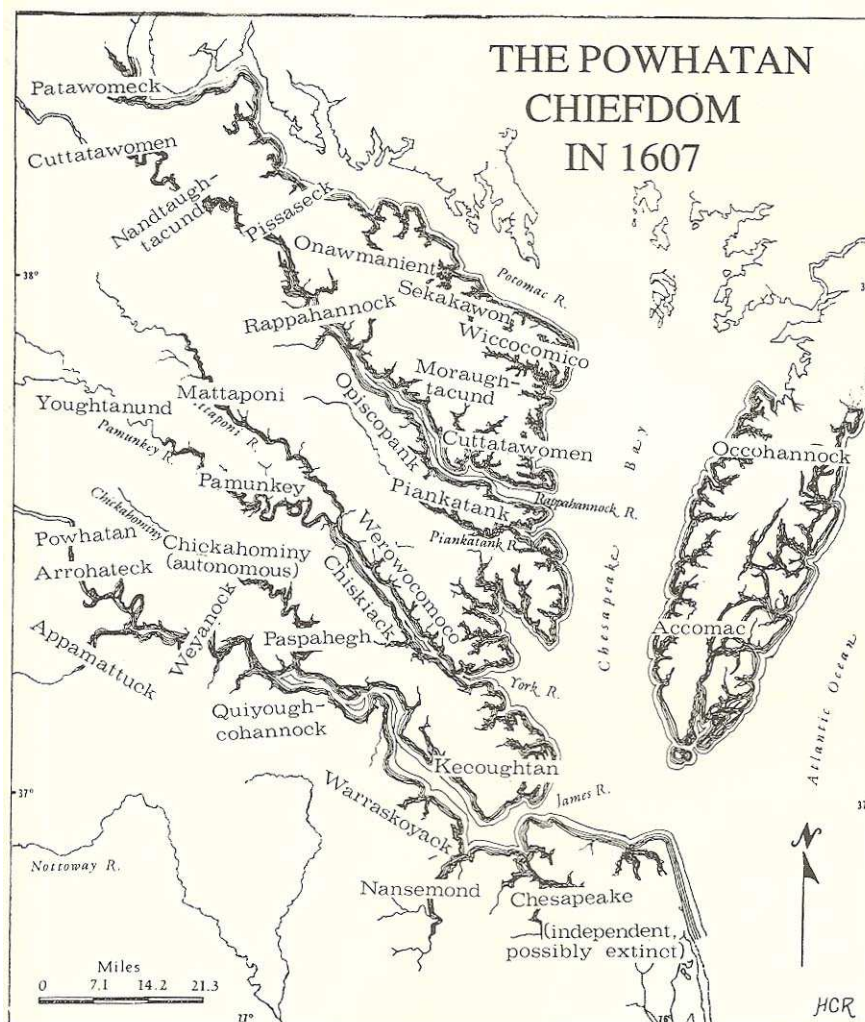
¹⁰ Axtell, *The Rise and Fall of the Powhatan Empire: Indians in Seventeenth-Century Virginia*, 1.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 4-5.

¹² John Smith, "The Generall Historie of Virginia, New-England, and the Summer Isles," in *The Complete Works of Captain John Smith: 1580-1631*, ed. Philip L. Barbour (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1986), 126; William Strachey, *The Historie of Travell into Virginia Britania (1612)*, ed. Loius B. Wright and Virginia Freund, Works Issued by the Hakluyt Society (London: the Hakluyt Society, 1953), 57-58; Turner, "Native American Protohistoric Interactions in the Powhatan Core Area," 78; Rice, "Escape from Tsenacommacah: Chesapeake Algonquians and the Powhatan Menace," 109.

piedmont. James Axtell argues that being well-born so near an enemy people taught Wahunsonacock to fear the loss of his inheritance early on and may explain his success at building a successful defensive paramount chiefdom.¹³ Wahunsonacock began expanding his inheritance around 1572. By the time the English arrived some 35 years later, he had conquered, or otherwise subjugated, some 35 distinct tribal groups in over 200 villages.

¹³ Axtell, *The Rise and Fall of the Powhatan Empire: Indians in Seventeenth-Century Virginia*, 4.



Map of the principal districts of Tsenacommacah in 1607. Drawn by Helen Rountree and published in *Powhatan Foreign Relations: 1500-1722*. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1994, 77.

When the English first met Wahunsonacock in 1607, he was in his sixties, though still hale and hearty. Cynical and world-weary John Smith, who was almost never impressed by anyone, described the Powhatan leader as a man possessing “such a grave and Majesticall countenance, as drave me into admiration to see such state in a naked Salvage.”¹⁴

¹⁴ John Smith, “A True Relation of Such Occurrences and Accidents of Note as Hath Hapned in Virginia [1608],” in *The Complete Works of Capitan John Smith (1580-1631)* ed. Philip L Barbour (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1986), 53.

Wahunsonacock's bearing reflected his station. He refused to visit the English in their settlement and insisted visitors come to his capital where he held court on a raccoon skin throne surrounded by forty body guards and favorites from among his hundred wives. The advanced age of Wahunsonacock was remarkable given the average life expectancy for Powhatans in the sixteenth century was fifty.¹⁵

As a leader in an Algonquian society, Wahunsonacock had many names depending on what role he was fulfilling. As paramount chief, Wahunsonacock's official title was *mamanatowick*, a word that combines the idea of a *werowance* with the concept of "manitou" or spiritual power. The material, the spiritual, and the political were inseparable in the person of the *mamanatowick* and the people for whom he acted."¹⁶ Both the English and his own people sometimes called him Powhatan after his home village. The same term was often applied by the English as an ethnic demonym to all the Algonquian-speaking tribes that answered to Wahunsonacock, leading to some confusion in the historical record. According to William Strachey, "His owne people sometimes call him Ottaniack, sometimes, Mamanatowick, which last signifies great King, but his proper right name which they salute him with (himself in presence) is [Wahunsonacock.]"¹⁷

By the time the English arrived in 1607, Tsenacommacah encompassed *almost* all of the Algonquian-speaking Indians of the coastal plain of Virginia from the Potomac River south to

¹⁵ Douglas H. Ubelaker, "Human Biology of Virginia Indians," in *Powhatan Foreign Relations: 1500-1722*, ed. Helen C. Rountree (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1993), 73.

¹⁶ Richter, "Tsenacommacah and the Atlantic World," 33-36; Alfred A. Cave, *Lethal Encounters : Englishmen and Indians in Colonial Virginia* (Santa Barbara, Calif.: Praeger, 2011), 30.

¹⁷ This work uses the familiar name, Wahunsonacock, when referring to the man and Powhatan only when referring to the Algonquian-speaking people within Tsenacommacah to avoid confusion. Strachey, *The Historie of Travell into Virginia Britania* (1612), 56.

the James, and even over the Chesapeake Bay on the Eastern Shore. Helen Rountree is the foremost student of the Powhatans and uses the term to refer to all Virginia Algonquians, just as English colonists did, despite widespread indigenous resistance to inclusion in Tsenacommacah. Rountree argues Wahunsonacock had nearly consolidated all the political entities in the tidewater into a new ethnic group within Tsenacommacah when the English arrived, so the term is useful.¹⁸ Still, it is important to remember that many of the constituent chiefdoms that composed Tsenacommacah still identified culturally, if not politically, with their former status as independent chiefdoms.¹⁹ For example, the Chickahominies of the upper James River stood out among the chiefdoms within Tsenacommacah because they were the only Algonquian group who managed to resist the Powhatan's imperium. They remained ruled by a council of elders and priests, not by a werowance tributary to Wahunsonacock, until 1616 when Opechancanough, Wahunsonacock's brother and successor, was able to force a district chief onto the Chickahominy and fully incorporate them into the paramountcy.²⁰ Despite remaining politically independent when the English arrived, the Chickahominies were on good enough terms with Wahunsonacock that they allowed themselves to be hired out, paid some tribute, and participated in a hunt with him.²¹

¹⁸ Rountree, *Pocahontas's People: The Powhatan Indians of Virginia through Four Centuries*, 13-14; *Powhatan Foreign Relations: 1500-1722* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1994), 5-7.

¹⁹ Rice, "Escape from Tsenacommacah: Chesapeake Algonquians and the Powhatan Menace."

²⁰ E. Randolph Turner, "Socio-Political Organization within the Powhatan Chiefdom and the Effects of European Contact, A.D. 1607-1646," in *Cultures in Contact: The Impact of European Contacts on Native American Cultural Institutions Ad 1000-1800*, ed. William W. Fitzhugh, *Anthropological Society of Washington Series* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1985), 197; Strachey, *The Historie of Travell into Virginia Britania (1612)*, 49; Robert Beverly, *The History and Present State of Virginia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2013), 35.

²¹ Rountree, *Powhatan Foreign Relations: 1500-1722*, 6-7; Strachey, *The Historie of Travell into Virginia Britania (1612)*, 68-69.

Political, Economic, and Spiritual Power in Tsenacommacah

Wahunsonacock managed to build and keep his paramount chiefdom by a combination of inheritance, military might, spiritual power, ideological consensus, limited control of trade routes as well as tribute, and a particularly keen understanding of indigenous politics. The Powhatans' domain of Tsenacommacah was a paramount chiefdom, more centralized than a confederacy and not centralized enough to be an "empire" as the English imagined. As a paramount chief, Wahunsonacock oversaw some thirty-five semi-independent district chiefs.²² Called werowances or werowansquas depending on gender, these regional chiefs, identifiable by their red-dyed deer hair coronets, oversaw local or town chiefs who were also known as werowances. "Werowance" is usually interpreted to mean "he is wealthy." Though the position of werowance was hereditary, wealth--both material and spiritual--were necessary to maintain social rank and was at the root of the Powhatan political organization.²³ The district werowances held their lands directly from Wahunsonacock and he often relocated them for political reasons.

Wahunsonacock's policy for expanding his paramountcy was to attack only those who resisted his expansion and to move their remnants closer to him, placing loyalists led by relatives in newly conquered areas. Also, Wahunsonacock himself often moved his seat of power to be nearer or farther away from problem spots. The farther away one got from the paramount chief himself, the less his authority. In the late 1590s when the chief of the Kecoughtans died, Wahunsonacock seized the opportunity and conquered the nearby chiefdom of 1,000 people.

²² Stephen R. Potter, "Early English Effects on Virginia Algonquian Exchange and Tribute in the Tidewater Potomac," in *Powhatan's Mantle: Indians in the Colonial Southeast*, ed. Gregory A. Waselkov, Peter H. Wood, and Tom Hatley (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2006), 237.

²³ *Ibid.*, 216.

Later, in the fall of 1608, he attacked the Piankatanks and moved the recently conquered Kecoughtans onto their land.²⁴

There is considerable scholarly debate over how much power Wahunsonacock really exerted over his chiefdoms. Smith and Strachey believed him an absolute ruler esteemed “halfe a God” whose will was law.²⁵ Many scholars suggest this is a gross exaggeration, as other Algonquian leaders in Eastern North America did not possess anything like that kind of power. Indeed, the powers of chiefs over their people are always limited, except in chiefdoms so highly centralized that they were almost states. The Powhatans did not approach state-level organization because the power to engage in foreign relations and to settle disputes violently between members did not rest solely with the paramount chief or the state. There was nothing equivalent to a crime against the state in Tsenacommacah other than to attack Wahunsonacock personally, and he did not intervene in intra-chiefdom rivalries. Rountree points out that while the paramount chief certainly had authority in some arenas, his power was by no means absolute, and his influence relied on coercion through promising prestige goods and threatening military action.²⁶ Rountree asserts that while Wahunsonacock enjoyed a political, religious, and ceremonial preeminence in his domain, his power was limited. Of course, evaluating chiefdoms by strict Euro-American rules of political organization ignores the degree to which political, spiritual, and economic power were intertwined in Tsenacommacah. It is important to note that consent in this context means support and respect; it does not mean committees in full consensus

²⁴ Strachey, *The Historie of Travell into Virginia Britania* (1612); John Smith, "A Map of Virginia [1612]," in *The Complete Works of Captain John Smith: 1580-1631*, ed. Philip L. Barbour (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1986).

²⁵ "The Generall Historie of Virginia, New-England, and the Summer Isles," 127; Strachey, *The Historie of Travell into Virginia Britania* (1612), 52-53.

²⁶ Rountree, *Powhatan Foreign Relations: 1500-1722*, 18-19.

arrived at all chiefly decisions. For example, while Wahunsonacock was unquestionably the paramount chief, his authority still rested on the council and consent of werowances, priests, and other well-respected men who had undergone a religious transformation and become *quioccosuks*.²⁷

The process of becoming a quioccosuk demonstrates the interrelated nature of political and spiritual power and how Wahunsonacock used both to build his paramount chiefdom. To become a leader in Powhatan society, young men had to endure and survive the *huskinaw* ritual. Often described as a vision quest or rite of manhood, the huskinaw was the fundamental ceremonial and spiritual event in the life of a young man. In short, it involved young men fasting, running a gauntlet, and living in isolation in the wilderness for nine months, all while under the influence of mind-altering drugs. Those who survived the ordeal were ritually “killed” and then “reborn” into the world of adult men, with seemingly no knowledge of their life before surrounded by women. If a young man survived the huskinaw, he acquired new spiritual insights and achieved a higher level of political power within his chiefdom. While the huskinaw is in many ways typical of rite-of-passage ceremonies among many indigenous groups in North America, in Tsenacommacah it also served as a strategy to build a fully integrated paramount chiefdom.²⁸ To be sure, the mamanatowick did not always command his werowances successfully, and did not mediate disputes between them, but he did on occasion put to death

²⁷ Gallivan, *James River Chiefdoms : The Rise of Social Inequality in the Chesapeake*, 24; Smith, "The Generall Historie of Virginia, New-England, and the Summer Isles," 125; Gleach, *Powhatan's World and Colonial Virginia: A Conflict of Cultures*, 31.

²⁸ Rountree, *Pocahontas's People: The Powhatan Indians of Virginia through Four Centuries*, 12; Gallivan, *James River Chiefdoms : The Rise of Social Inequality in the Chesapeake*, 26-27; Rice, "Escape from Tsenacommacah: Chesapeake Algonquians and the Powhatan Menace," 114-15; Gleach, *Powhatan's World and Colonial Virginia: A Conflict of Cultures*, 38-43.

those who openly defied chiefs and priests. When the English witnessed Wahunsonacock exercise this kind of power and saw young men willingly submit to the huskinaw ritual, it led them to believe that the paramount chief commanded absolute loyalty, a perception that contributed to their thinking him treacherous when lesser werowances failed to act as he instructed.²⁹ While Rountree is correct to point out that Wahunsonacock did not exert the same level of control over his werowances that the Europeans expected he did, his werowances still respected his authority and feared his wrath.³⁰

Economics were also difficult to separate from politics and spiritual matters. Much of the paramount chief's power came from his control of prestige goods, as well as through diplomatic and trade alliances. Prestige-goods usually came from far away along unstable trade routes. Their value was directly proportional to the difficulty of obtaining them. In Tsenacommacah, copper was the most important prestige good, the redder the better. The spiritual power of prestige goods came with their affiliation with ancestors, or the primordial powers which first created them. Goods always maintained a trace of that power about them, likewise, they never fully belong to the new owners, but retain something of the giver, conveying the power of the giver even when in the hands of the recipient.³¹ In a chiefdom, however, prestige goods and alliances did not necessarily pass to a werowance's successor. Only the opportunity for power passed

²⁹ As the next chapter will explore more thoroughly, Rountree finds the disconnect between the coercive power of Wahunsonacock and his ability to regulate the day to day life of his people to be at the heart of indigenous/European conflicts and thinks this explains why Europeans often view Indians as treacherous. Rountree, *Powhatan Foreign Relations: 1500-1722*, 10-13. Nancy Oestreich Lurie, "Indian Cultural Adjustment to European Civilization," in *Seventeenth-Century America: Essays in Colonial History*, ed. James Morton Smith (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1959), 46.

³⁰ Gleach, *Powhatan's World and Colonial Virginia: A Conflict of Cultures*, 28-42; Rountree, *Powhatan Foreign Relations: 1500-1722*, 13-18; Rice, "Escape from Tsenacommacah: Chesapeake Algonquians and the Powhatan Menace," 111-12.

³¹ Daniel K. Richter, "Tsenacommacah and the Atlantic World," *ibid.*, ed. Peter C. Mancall, 32-33; Earle, "Chiefdoms in Archaeological and Ethnohistorical Perspective," 281, 97.

down to successors, not power itself. The potential for new leaders to fail in developing and maintaining trade networks to provide their own connections to prestige goods is one of the reasons chiefdoms were often unstable.³²

Prestige goods are positively correlated with the distance (real or ascribed) they traveled from their place of origin (again, real or ascribed) to the recipient. Thus, things from very far away are especially potent carriers of spiritual power. During late prehistory, large-scale indigenous trade networks seem to have been less well traveled than during the woodland period. While indigenous trade networks were less busy, copper continued to flow from the Great Lakes area and shell beads from the Middle Atlantic continued to flow back.³³ By indirect exchange between communities, marine shells from the Chesapeake traveled up the Susquehanna River into central New York. Once Europeans introduced their trade goods, they too flowed along this trade route. Though they were often hostile towards their neighbors, the Powhatans had extensive trading networks that traveled far beyond their borders. In 1610, Francis Magnel, an Irish spy working for the Spanish reported that in Virginia “the emperor sends every year some men by land to West India and to Newfoundland and other countries, to bring him news of what is going on there.”³⁴ Magnel’s report is full of exaggerations, likely making it an overstatement to say that Powhatan messengers traveled as far as he says, but clearly messengers and traders were moving far beyond the boundaries of Tsenacommacah.

³² Richter, "Tsenacommacah and the Atlantic World," 36; Potter, *Commoners, Tribute, and Chiefs : The Development of Algonquian Culture in the Potomac Valley*, 210-20.

³³ George R. Hamell, "The Iroquois and the World's Rim: Speculations on Color, Culture, and Contact," *American Indian Quarterly* 16, no. 4 (Autumn, 1992): 458.

³⁴ Magnel, "Report of What Francis Magnel, an Irishman, Learned in the State of Virginia During the Eight Months That He Was There, 1 July 1610," 450.

Powhatans coveted copper as much for its color as its rarity. Eastern Woodland Indian cultures shared some general attitudes towards substances like copper, shell, and crystal. All three materials are prominent in myths and rituals throughout the region. Red, White, and Black are the three most important colors in the semiotic system of the Northeastern Woodlands. These three colors represent what George Hamell terms three “ritual states of being:” social (white), asocial (black) and anti-social (red).³⁵ Red (copper) suggests blood, life, heat and fire, connoting the animate and emotive aspects of life. White is also life, but it connotes the thinking, mind, knowledge, greatest being, old peoples hair, harmony, and purposiveness of mind. Black is death, lack of cognition, absence of well-meaning.³⁶ This semiotic system helps explain why copper should be so coveted by the Powhatans.

English observers reported that Tsenacommacah’s district werowances paid Wahunsonacock tribute including “skinnes, beads, copper, pearls, deare, turkeys, wild beasts, and corn.”³⁷ One of the keenest observers of Algonquian life in the early contact period, William Strachey, noted that Wahunsonacock kept eight-tenths of the produce of his subjects.³⁸ It is important to note that that Strachey’s figure of an 80% tax rate must have come out of the tribute paid from lesser werowances and sub-chiefs, not from the gross production of all the people within Tsenacommacah, as an 80% reduction in food would leave a subsistence-based people starved to death.³⁹ Tsenacommacah was not so abundant that it could feed its people on 20% of

³⁵ Hamell, "The Iroquois and the World's Rim: Speculations on Color, Culture, and Contact," 456.

³⁶ "Trading in Metaphors: The Magic of Beads, Another Perspective Upon Indian-European Contact in Northeastern North America," in *Proceedings of the 1982 Glass Trade Bead Conference*, ed. Charles F. Hayes III (Rochester, NY: Rochester Museum and Science Center, 1983), 6-7.

³⁷ Smith, "A Map of Virginia [1612]," 127; Strachey, *The Historie of Travell into Virginia Britania (1612)*, 87.

³⁸ *The Historie of Travell into Virginia Britania (1612)*, 87.

³⁹ Potter, "Early English Effects on Virginia Algonquian Exchange and Tribute in the Tidewater Potomac," 217.

their produce. Whatever the percentage he took, Wahunsonacock redistributed much of it among his werowances to build political and military support. Moreover, the collected food provided for priests and religious ceremonies as well as supplied ceremonial feasts and provided for visiting dignitaries and traders. Rarer prestige goods such as copper and strands of beads or pearls were redistributed as special rewards requiring spiritual as well as material payment such as bravery in battle. Beyond using copper and prestige goods as a kind of payment or reward, chiefs also gave away much of their wealth as gifts to cultivate a sense of obligation and indebtedness on the part of the recipient. Gift giving helped cultivate the deference that allowed a paramount chief to depend on the support of his councilors. Tsenacommacah did not function as a full-scale redistributive chiefdom. Werowances only paid prestige goods in tribute, and Wahunsonacock distributed prestige goods as payment to loyal werowances; food was seldom redistributed except during feasts.⁴⁰ Even so, such a volume of tribute necessitated storehouses.

Tsenacommacah's storehouses served as places to keep tribute, as temples, and as mortuaries for the bones of dead werowances. The storehouse-temples highlight how intertwined economic, spiritual and political power was in Tsenacommacah. John Smith described the largest one as, "50 or 60 yards in length...at the 4 corners of this house stand 4 Images as Sentinels, one of a Dragon, another a Beare, the 3 like a Leopard and the fourth like a giant like man, all made evill favordly, according to their best workmanship."⁴¹ Wahunsonacock maintained his power by

⁴⁰ Rountree, *The Powhatan Indians of Virginia: Their Traditional Culture*, 109-11. There is much debate surrounding the 80% tax rate and whether staples or prestige goods were required as tribute for the mamatanowick, for more on this debate see: Potter, "Early English Effects on Virginia Algonquian Exchange and Tribute in the Tidewater Potomac," 217-18; Turner, "Socio-Political Organization within the Powhatan Chiefdom and the Effects of European Contact, A.D. 1607-1646," 201-04; Gallivan, *James River Chiefdoms : The Rise of Social Inequality in the Chesapeake*, 171-76.

⁴¹ Smith, "A Map of Virginia [1612]," 173-74.

extending the carrot of powerful spiritual gifts and the stick of meeting out fierce punishments for those that broke the rules.

Foreigners and Enemies: Monacans and Iroquoians

Whether the Algonquian-speaking peoples of the Virginia coastal plain thought of themselves as a united people or not, they knew that they had more in common with each other than with their non-Algonquian-speaking neighbors and enemies. Rountree argues the Powhatans were, much like the newly arrived English, a complex, well-informed, and ethnocentric people accustomed to dealing with “foreigners.”⁴² Tsenacommacah’s enemies lay all around, and long before the arrival of the English these indigenous intruders were one of the factors that forced the disparate Algonquian speaking peoples of the Chesapeake to consolidate and unite in order to resist the invaders.⁴³ The most menacing threat seems to have come from the far north. Iroquoian-speaking peoples known to the Powhatans as Massawomecks traveled down the Susquehanna and Potomac rivers into Powhatan territory on raiding campaigns. That

Wahunsonacock made no effort to expand his territory beyond the tidewater region lends credence to the idea that Tsenacommacah coalesced largely as a defensive network to repel raids from Iroquoians to the north.⁴⁴ The Massawomecks seem to have sparked a particular fear as the Powhatans palisaded towns on the far northern frontiers of Tsenacommacah, an expensive

⁴² Helen C. Rountree, “The Powhatans and the English: A Case of Multiple Conflicting Agendas,” in *Powhatan Foreign Relations: 1500-1722*, ed. Helen C. Rountree (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1993), 173. For more on the notion of “cosmopolitanism” see: Games, *The Web of Empire*.

⁴³ Cave, *Lethal Encounters : Englishmen and Indians in Colonial Virginia*, 30; Rice, “Escape from Tsenacommacah: Chesapeake Algonquians and the Powhatan Menace,” 106-07.

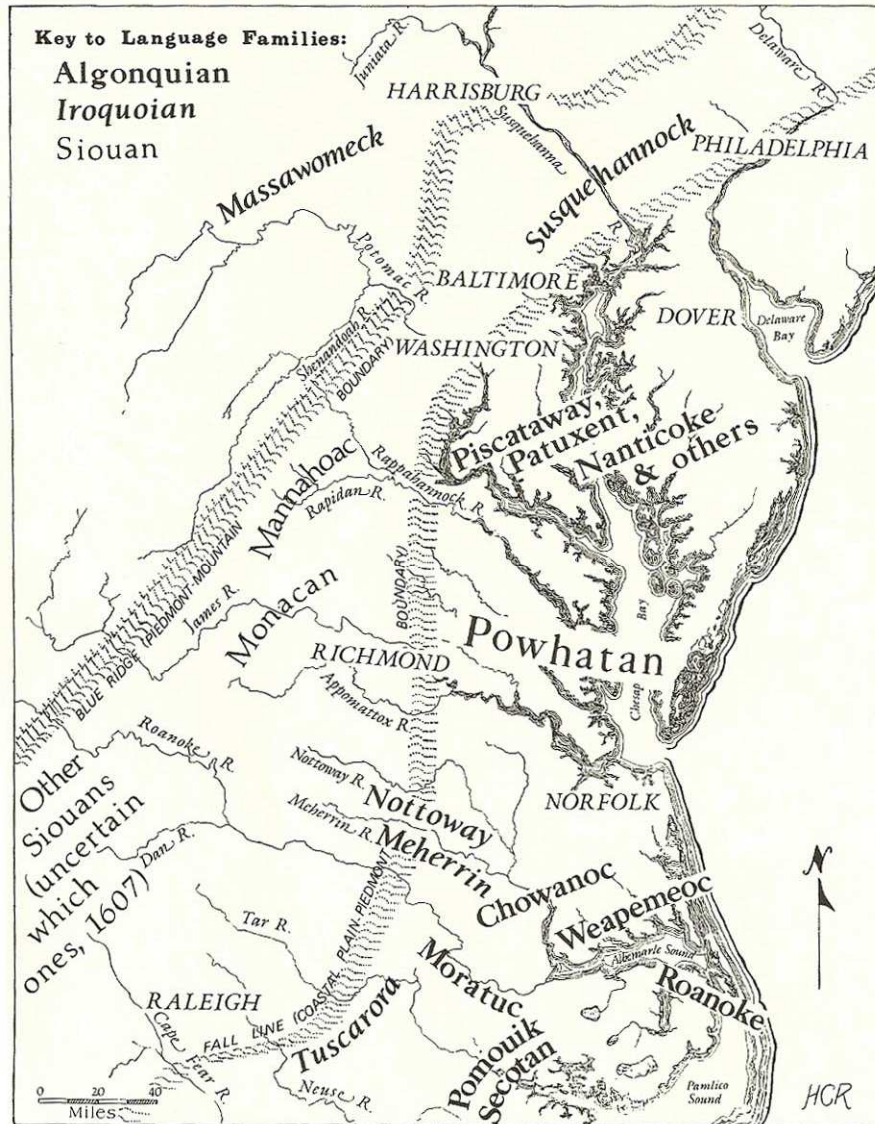
⁴⁴ Cave, *Lethal Encounters : Englishmen and Indians in Colonial Virginia*, 30.

precaution not bothered with elsewhere.⁴⁵ Indeed, John Smith recorded that the Massawomecks were the Powhatans' "most mortall enimies."⁴⁶ The Massawomecks were likely part of a general southward push brought on by the beginning of the Little Ice Age around 1300. This climactic cooling trend meant that northern agricultural peoples faced shorter growing seasons and more frequent crop failures, leading them to push southward into the Chesapeake in search of better conditions, but also led them into conflict with the extant Algonquian-speakers.⁴⁷ To the north of Tsenacommacah, the fall line marked the border between Algonquian-speaking peoples who shared a culture, if not political ties, with Wahunsonacock and enemy indigenous peoples who they saw as dangerous and foreign.

⁴⁵ Strachey, *The Historie of Travell into Virginia Britania* (1612), 48; Smith, "The Proceedings of the English Colonie in Virginia, [1606-1612]," 230-31; Rice, "Escape from Tsenacommacah: Chesapeake Algonquians and the Powhatan Menace," 104-06. Rountree, *The Powhatan Indians of Virginia: Their Traditional Culture*, 120.

⁴⁶ Smith, "A Map of Virginia [1612]," 166.

⁴⁷ John E. Kutzbach and Webb Thompson III, "Climate and Climate History in the Chesapeake Bay Region," in *Discovering the Chesapeake: The History of an Ecosystem*, ed. Philip D. Curtin, Grace S. Brush, and George W. Fisher (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), 23-27; Rice, "Escape from Tsenacommacah: Chesapeake Algonquians and the Powhatan Menace," 104-05; Potter, *Commoners, Tribute, and Chiefs : The Development of Algonquian Culture in the Potomac Valley*, 154.



Map of indigenous groups of the mid-Atlantic in 1607. Drawn by Helen C. Rountree and published in *Powhatan Foreign Relations: 1500-1722*. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1994, ii.

To the west, Siouan-speaking peoples known as the Monacans and Mannahoacs presented a more immediate, if less terrifying, threat to the core of Tsenacommacah. Centered in the piedmont on the upper James River valley beyond the fall line, the Monacans frequently swapped attacks with the Powhatans. The Mannahoacs, centered farther north in the upper

Rappahannock River valley, were culturally similar and often politically allied with the neighboring Monacans. The Monacans seem to have been less dangerous or, more likely, less consistently hostile than the Massawomecks.⁴⁸ Despite their alien culture, they were such a familiar enemy to the Powhatans that in an elaborate mock battle staged for English visitors in 1607, the “enemy” team took on the identity of Monacans.⁴⁹ In such a fictional battle, it seems significant that the Powhatans chose the Monacans as the enemy to represent. While the surviving sources present the Monacans as traditional and “deadly enemies” from time immemorial, archaeologist Jeffery Hantman argues that the two groups shared a flexible, permeable boundary and were not constantly at war.⁵⁰ The leading authority on the Monacan, Jeffery Hantman argues that the Monacans’ easy access to copper, steatite and other prestige goods, either through local production in the Blue Ridge Mountains or access to trade networks with the Great Lakes region, meant that they were one of the only sources for copper in the Chesapeake before the arrival of the English. Because copper was such an important symbolic, political, and spiritual resource in the Algonquian Chesapeake, the Monacans’ near monopoly must have been a point of friction between them and the Powhatans, as it left Wahunsonacock potentially dependent on the Monacans for an important prestige good.⁵¹ While the two groups

⁴⁸ Jeffrey L. Hantman, "Powhatan's Relations with the Piedmond Monacans," in *Powhatan Foreign Relations: 1500, 1722*, ed. Helen C. Rountree (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1993), 102.

⁴⁹ Strachey, *The Historie of Travell into Virginia Britania (1612)*, 107; Rountree, *The Powhatan Indians of Virginia: Their Traditional Culture*, 122-23.

⁵⁰ Gabriel Archer, "Relatyon of the Discovery of Our River," in *Jamestown Narratives: Eyewitness Accounts of the Virginia Colony*, ed. Edward Wright Haile (Champlain, VA: Roundhouse, 2001 [1607]), 109-10; Hantman, "Powhatan's Relations with the Piedmond Monacans," 100-01; Strachey, *The Historie of Travell into Virginia Britania (1612)*, 102.

⁵¹ John F. Scarry and Mintcy D. Maxham, "Elite Actors in the Protohistoric: Elite Identities and Interaction with Europeans in the Apalachee and Powhatan Chiefdoms," in *Between Contacts and Colonies: Archaeological Perspectives on the Protohistoric Southeast*, ed. Cameron B. Wesson and Mark A. Rees (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2002), 163; Jeffrey L. Hantman, "Between Powhatan and Quirank: Reconstructing Monacan Culture and History in the Context of Jamestown," *American Anthropologist* 92, no. 3 (Sept. 1990): 685.

had distinct cultures, their hostility may have arisen because they shared a similar economy and thus competed for the same resources.⁵² There is historic and archaeological evidence that they were hostile when the Spanish visited in 1570 and perhaps even back into the Late Woodland period between 800-1000 CE.⁵³

At the time of English arrival, the Powhatan's expansion westward seems to have been turned back by the Monacans. After 1607, as the Powhatans tried to monopolize the newly arrived English copper, the balance of power shifted back towards the Powhatans until it ultimately moved to the English. The Monacan-Powhatan relationship shifted from friend to enemy often in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. In 1611 and in 1677 the two groups allied together in opposition to the English.⁵⁴ Though they differed linguistically as well as culturally and appeared to be long-time enemies at the time of English contact, the Monacans and Powhatans constructed a far more flexible relationship in the protohistoric and later colonial periods than at the time of English colonization.⁵⁵

English sources from the early-contact period often mention English attempts to tempt Wahunsonacock into agreeing to various English schemes by offering him aid in attacking the Monacans. In the fall of 1608, the English leader Christopher Newport offered the Powhatan leader his aid in attacking the Monacans. John Smith recorded Wahunsonacock's "subtile" reply, "neither will I bite at such a baite: as for the Monacan's I can revenge my owne injuries."⁵⁶

⁵² "Between Powhatan and Quirank: Reconstructing Monacan Culture and History in the Context of Jamestown."

⁵³ Bartolomé Martínez, "Relation of Bartolomé Martínez," in *The Spanish Jesuit Mission in Virginia: 1570-1572*, ed. S.J. Clifford M. Lewis and S.J. Albert J. Loomie (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1953), 161; Turner, "Native American Protohistoric Interactions in the Powhatan Core Area," 80, 88.

⁵⁴ Strachey, *The Historie of Travell into Virginia Britania* (1612), 105.

⁵⁵ Hantman, "Powhatan's Relations with the Piedmond Monacans," 107-10; "Between Powhatan and Quirank: Reconstructing Monacan Culture and History in the Context of Jamestown."

⁵⁶ Smith, "The Proceedings of the English Colonie in Virginia, [1606-1612]," 236.

Hantman suggests this refusal was either because Wahunsonacock was reluctant to fight the Monacans or wanted to demonstrate he could fight his own battles, but as will be developed in chapter four, the paramount chief's refusal was part of his larger plan to keep the English from making alliances with his enemies.⁵⁷

The English clearly hoped their knowledge of Wahunsonacock's indigenous enemies could be exploited diplomatically, though in the case of the Monacans it never was. As noted above, Wahunsonacock always refused English offers for aid in fighting or invading the Monacans territory. The English often attempted to bait the Powhatan leader by suggesting that they were angry with the Monacans and that the two peoples should unite against them, but he never acquiesced. For example, John Smith related one occasion when Wahunsonacock demanded to know why the English had traveled so far upriver to the fall line when they knew it was dangerous. Smith told Wahunsonacock that they were looking for some Monacans they suspected had killed an Englishman in an attempt to prove his alliance with the Powhatans. Wahunsonacock's response to Smith's explanation, far from being pleased that the English were hostile towards his enemies, was to disarm the situation by insisting that the murderers were from "Anchanachuck," not Monacan, and that he would revenge their deaths himself. In an effort to redirect the English away from the fall line, Wahunsonacock went on to describe another enemy, the "Pocoughtronack, a fierce Nation that did eate men," likely a reference to the Iroquoian speaking peoples to the north.⁵⁸ This exchange suggests Wahunsonacock was more interested in keeping the Monacans and English separate than in using the English against them.

⁵⁷ Hantman, "Powhatan's Relations with the Piedmond Monacans," 101.

⁵⁸ Smith, "A True Relation [1608]," 55.

The one occasion where it seemed that Wahunsonacock was willing to allow an English attack on the Monacans, he insisted that "First hee would send his spies, perfectly to understand their [the Monacans] strength and ability to fight, with which he would acquaint us himself."⁵⁹ The attack never took place and the spies were never sent, but it does seem telling that in the one case where Wahunsonacock offered any kind of encouragement to an English foray into Monacan territory he insisted his people go first. This insistence suggests Wahunsonacock knew the power of controlling information and wanted to control what information made it to the English and prevent any chance, friendly meetings between the two peoples.

Wahunsonacock's refusal to take English offers of military help had a more complex reason than the English at the time believed. The Powhatan leader's plan for the English did not include introducing his new source of copper and potential power to his enemies to the west. The Monacans were fearsome opponents when the English arrived, but that relationship was not as fixed and constant as the English believed. For Wahunsonacock, attacking the Monacans with English arms would be a waste - it was far more important for him to establish a trade relationship with the English and then use native power against the Monacans.⁶⁰ This seems to be another case of Wahunsonacock attempting to incorporate and use the English shrewdly, without giving them too much information or allowing them to make contact with his enemies. Instead of using English military might against his enemies, Wahunsonacock wisely sought to keep the two groups far apart, lest they unite against him.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 73-75.

⁶⁰ Hantman, "Between Powhatan and Quirank: Reconstructing Monacan Culture and History in the Context of Jamestown," 685.

While the Siouan- and Iroquoian-speaking enemies of Tsenacommacah were the most foreign, neighboring Algonquian speaking groups were also often hostile. As Wahunsonacock expanded his domains across the coastal plain, he incorporated many Algonquian speakers--not all of whom were happy to be a part of his paramountcy. Especially in outlying provinces like those on the Eastern Shore and south bank of the Potomac, what Helen Rountree calls the Powhatans “ethnic fringe,” werowances pursued their independent political goals as well as they could.⁶¹ Even within Tsenacommacah, werowances often attempted to co-opt the English into trade relationships and cut out Wahunsonacock.

Tsenacommacah Politics

Within Tsenacommacah, only those chiefdoms that were Wahunsonacock’s personal inheritance considered themselves completely, culturally, Powhatan. The paramountcy grew from Wahunsonacock’s inheritance of the Pamunkey, Youghthanund, Mattaponi, Powhatan, Arrohatexk, and Appamattuck chiefdoms between the James and York River in the mid-sixteenth century to encompass all of the Algonquian-speaking peoples of the Chesapeake plain south of the Potomac River, north of the James and to the east of the fall-line of Tsenacommacah’s several rivers. As noted above, the Chickahominies, not a chiefdom but a group ruled by a council of elders, were the lone holdout among the Algonquian groups of the coastal plain who resisted the Powhatan paramount chief’s overtures and threats successfully. They would continue to do so until Opechancanough, Wahunsonacock’s brother and successor, convinced them to join with him in 1616.

⁶¹ Rountree, *The Powhatan Indians of Virginia: Their Traditional Culture*, 14.

While the Chickahominies were the only group to successfully resist the overtures of Wahunsonacock, the most recently incorporated chiefdoms continued to resist his authority. Factionalism plagued Tsenacommacah. Each town in Tsenacommacah was ruled by a chief, and each chief answered to a district chief who answered to the paramount chief. In an effort to build an identity for the whole of Tsenacommacah similar to that of its core, Wahunsonacock sometimes moved entire conquered districts, moving peoples on the ethnic fringe closer to him and placing family members and trusted werowances in the abandoned districts.⁶² As one moved farther from the core of Tsenacommacah, chiefdoms were less and less likely to consider themselves Powhatan, though they recognized their political and economic ties to Wahunsonacock.⁶³ Within Tsenacommacah's cultural core, Wahunsonacock's authority came not only from his economic connections and military power, but also from his inherited position as werowance and his spiritual power as mamanatowick. Through nepotism, rituals such as the huskinaw, trade good distribution and the threat of violence, Wahunsonacock attempted to build a united identity throughout Tsenacommacah.

Wahunsonacock's brother and successor, Opechancanough, was the richest of the werowances and ruled over the important Pamunkey tribe. The Pamunkey were the largest tribe in Powhatan's domain with a population of around 1200 including 300 warriors on hand with the wealth to mobilize a thousand more bowmen with two days' notice. Opechancno, as they called their land, was abundant with copper and pearls, and it was from these prestige goods, as well as ties to his brother, that Opechancanough got his power.⁶⁴ While Wahunsonacock as paramount

⁶² Gallivan, *James River Chiefdoms : The Rise of Social Inequality in the Chesapeake*, 24.

⁶³ Rountree, *The Powhatan Indians of Virginia: Their Traditional Culture*, 14.

⁶⁴ J. Frederick Fausz, "Opechancanough: Indian Resistance Leader," in *Struggle and Survival in Colonial America*, ed. Gary B. Nash and David G. Sweet (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981), 23.

chief often oversaw both foreign and domestic affairs, the Powhatan political system usually operated with dual chiefs. In such systems, an inside, white, or peace chief, usually the most powerful and elder of the two chiefs, set policy for the groups and oversaw domestic issues, while an outside, red, or war chief who led war councils and dealt with foreigners.⁶⁵ In Tsenacommacah in 1607, Wahunsonacock's brother Opechancanough seemed to have held the war chief role. After Wahunsonacock's death in 1618, Opechancanough succeeded him as paramount chief of Tsenacommacah.

The Eastern Shore – Accomacs and Occohannocks

Tsenacommacah's tentacles stretched even across the great expanse of the Chesapeake Bay to include chiefdoms on the Eastern Shore. Culturally more similar to the Virginia Algonquians than to the Algonquian-speaking Maryland tribes in the upper Delmarva Peninsula, the Accomacs and Occohannocks on the Eastern Shore formed the far-eastern fringe of Tsenacommacah. Because they lived so far from the heart of the paramountcy, it is unlikely that the Powhatans subdued them by force. In fact it is questionable if they considered themselves part of Tsenacommacah at all.⁶⁶ The only documentary evidence that they were included in the paramountcy is a single mention by John Smith and copied by William Strachey which recorded, "Accohanock...and....Accowmack...do equalize any of the terrytoryes of Powhatan, and speak his language, who over all those doth rule as kinge."⁶⁷ The Accomacs and Occohannocks were

⁶⁵ Gallivan, *James River Chiefdoms : The Rise of Social Inequality in the Chesapeake*, 25; Gleach, *Powhatan's World and Colonial Virginia: A Conflict of Cultures*, 35; Kupperman, *Indians and English : Facing Off in Early America*, 102.

⁶⁶ Thomas E. Davidson, "Relations between the Powhatans and the Eastern Shore," in *Powhatan Foreign Relations*, ed. Helen C. Rountree (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1993).

⁶⁷ Strachey, *The Historie of Travell into Virginia Britania (1612)*, 49; Smith, "A Map of Virginia [1612]," 150.

important as trading partners because, as discussed in the next chapter, they provided marine shells and other trade items that could not be produced on the mainland. There must have been an economic advantage for the Eastern Shore chiefdoms in associating with the Powhatans, but it is unclear what they received in exchange for their produce, possibly the red dye, puccoon.⁶⁸ Smith recorded that Wahunsonacock bragged to him about his “Canowes, and described unto me how he sent them over the Baye, for tribute Beades, and also what Countries paide him Beats, Copper or Skins.”⁶⁹ The chiefdoms of the Eastern Shore were examples of the kind of tribute/trading ties that helped tie Tsenacommacah together, even in the absence of military power.

The trade networks that carried goods into and out of Tsenacommacah also carried people and news. The plethora of rivers in the Virginia tidewater meant that news traveled quickly by canoe and often crossed several languages. When there were no waterways, footpaths connected all the towns in Tsenacommacah and many stretched out far beyond the Chesapeake plain.⁷⁰ Hospitality was critically important for indigenous traders far from home. Approaching a friendly settlement, one could expect food and hospitality, though not necessarily deep conversation for the night. In the morning, serious conversation and business could take place, once everyone was rested and fed and ready for the lengthy oration required to conduct such

⁶⁸ Davidson, "Relations between the Powhatans and the Eastern Shore," 152-53.

⁶⁹ Smith, "A True Relation [1608]," 69.

⁷⁰ Rountree, "The Powhatans and Other Woodland Indians as Travelers."

business.⁷¹ Despite their hostile relationships with other groups in the region, the trading paths leading out of Tsenacommacah often tracked both west and south.⁷²

The South: Across the James River

While Tsenacommacah's relations with indigenous nations to the north and west were usually hostile and relations with the Eastern Shore were generally peaceful, the situation to the south was more complex. The North Carolina Algonquians and Iroquoian groups to the south of Tsenacommacah seem to have both traded and fought with the Powhatans.⁷³ The Algonquian-speaking Chowanocks and Iroquoian-Speaking Nottoways, Meherrins, and Tuscaroras were sometimes trading partners and sometimes raiding victims and they may have periodically allied against Powhatan intrusions into their territory.⁷⁴ Just as the Monacans limited Powhatan access to copper, groups to the south of Tsenacommacah controlled access to the prestige good puccoon. A red dye in high demand among the Powhatan elite for both ceremonial and medicinal use, puccoon grew only in the pine barrens south of the James River.⁷⁵ Maintaining access to puccoon must have been at the heart of relations between the Powhatans and their southern neighbors.

The most important of the groups to the South of the James for our purposes were the Chesapeakes. The Chesapeakes or Chessiopeians who lent their name to the bay lived near the coast at the mouth of the James River and resisted Wahunsonacock's attempts to subdue them

⁷¹ Ibid., 39-41.

⁷² E. Randolph Turner, "Native American Protohistoric Interactions in the Powhatan Core Area," *ibid.*, ed. Helen C. Rountree (University Press of Virginia), 82.

⁷³ An unoccupied "buffer zone" marked the land south of the James River, much like a similar unoccupied area near the fall-line between the Monacans and Powhatans. *Ibid.*, 81.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 80.

⁷⁵ Rountree, *The Powhatan Indians of Virginia: Their Traditional Culture*, 56.

into Tsenacommacah until just about the time the English arrived in 1607. William Strachey recorded that a *wiochist* (or priest) warned Wahunsonacock that “from the Chesapeack Bay a nation should arise, which should dissolve and give end to his empire, for which, not many yeares sense, ... he destroyed and put to sword all such who might lye under any doubtful construction of the said prophecy.”⁷⁶ Strachey goes on to suggest that it was only by the grace of God that the paramount chief misinterpreted the prophecy and exterminated the Chesapeakes instead of the English.⁷⁷ By situating Wahunsonacock at the center of a native ground, the seemingly ill-advised decision to tolerate the relatively weak English colonists who arrived in 1607 is revealed to be a well-informed, calculated risk rather than a mistake or a matter of course.

Since the seventeenth century, historians have tended to agree with Strachey’s interpretation of the Chesapeake-doom prophecy. Indeed, in hindsight it is difficult to disagree with Strachey’s interpretation of where the real threat lay for the Powhatans. Most historians continue to see Wahunsonacock’s decision as a simple one. Whatever his motivation, he had only to pick which group seemed the greater evil. For example, Helen Rountree situates Wahunsonacock’s decision within an indigenous world view and argues that because the paramount chief was unsure if the English would be allies or enemies, he focused on the indigenous Chesapeakes as a known enemy that had long refused to be drawn into his paramountcy.⁷⁸ Similarly, Frederick Fausz argues the Wahunsonacock decided to spare the

⁷⁶ Strachey, *The Historie of Travell into Virginia Britania* (1612), 101.

⁷⁷ Ibid; Rountree, *The Powhatan Indians of Virginia: Their Traditional Culture*, 120-21.

⁷⁸ *The Powhatan Indians of Virginia: Their Traditional Culture*, 121; *Pocahontas's People: The Powhatan Indians of Virginia through Four Centuries*, 27.

English because they seemed useful, but “too weak for conquest prophesies.”⁷⁹ Fausz argues Wahunsonacock evaluated the English carefully, weighing their weakness (they had no food or women and desired to settle on worthless land) against their potential usefulness as trading partners, and (guns and prestige goods) decided “why not use them instead of kill them?”⁸⁰ Rountree and Fausz both essentially agree with Strachey, they just prefer rational instead of religious reasons for his attack on Chesapeakes instead of the English. James Axtell’s argument presents a somewhat different view. Axtell argues that Wahunsonacock exterminated the Chesapeakes to hedge his bets and demonstrate his power to the English. While Axtell is correct that Wahunsonacock was capable of more nuanced thinking than simply choosing to attack the greater of two evils, his suggestion that Wahunsonacock would exterminate an entire nation to prove his power to the English seems unlikely and entirely out of character.⁸¹ Launching a large-scale attack was rare for the Powhatans, whose warfare typically consisted of small-scale raiding missions. Moreover, the English were only vaguely aware through Indian informants of the Chesapeakes’ destruction. If the Powhatan paramount chief had intended his attack to send a message, he would have found a more direct way. Still, Axtell expands the possible motivations and knowledge of Wahunsonacock beyond that of a first-contact character type who, bound by his experience and failing to appreciate the new and catastrophic nature of the English presence, chose to attack a familiar enemy and doomed his people.⁸²

⁷⁹ J. Frederick Fausz, "Patterns of Anglo-Indian Aggression and Accommodation Along the Mid-Atlantic Coast, 1584-1634," in *Cultures in Contact: The Impact of European Contacts on Native American Cultural Institutions, Ad 1000-1800*, ed. William W. Fitzhugh (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1985), 237.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 236-37.

⁸¹ James Axtell, *Natives and Newcomers: The Cultural Origins of North America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 21.

⁸² Ibid.

By situating Wahunsonacock as an indigenous leader who made decisions both as the ruler of a powerful, new, and expanding paramountcy as well as a leader on the fringes of an Atlantic world who was aware of the possibilities the English brought with them, his actions against the Chesapeakes make more sense. The Chesapeakes existed on the fringes of Tsenacommacah and were located at the mouth of the James River, near to the English. In fact, in the early 1580s, well before the arrival of the Jamestown colonists, Ralph Lane of the Roanoke voyages mentioned that the Chesapeakes might make good allies.⁸³ Because of their geographic location and potential for defection, simply punishing or moving the Chesapeakes would not have sent a strong enough message. Far from misunderstanding the threat that the English represented or acting to impress the English with his power, Wahunsonacock calculated his actions to make sure that the newly arriving English settlers would have no choice but to seek him out as an ally. Wahunsonacock attacked the Chesapeakes because he knew precisely how valuable and dangerous the English were, and wanted to make sure they did not ally with this unruly province on the lower James River. Indeed, as observers of the frequent visits from European traders/raiders, as well as the disease and violence that came with them, the Powhatan prophets who suggested a nation would arise in the Chesapeake to take over Wahunsonacock could have made the same predictions without divine help. The next chapter moves beyond a native ground to place Tsenacommacah within the burgeoning Atlantic world.

⁸³ Ralph Lane, "17 August 1585-18 June 1586, Ralph Lane's Discourse on the First Colony," in *The Roanoke Voyages: 1584-1590*, ed. David B. Quinn, 2nd Ser. (London: The Hakluyt Society, 1955), 281.

Chapter 2: Tsenacommacah's European Connections

In 1621 a Patawomeck chief displayed for an astonished English visitor a "China Boxe" made of "braided palmito, painted without, and lined in the inside with blue Taffata after the China or East India fashion." When pressed about where he got the box, the Patawomeck chief answered that, "it was presented to him by a certaine people of the Mountaines toward the South-west, who got it from another Nation beyond them some thirtie dayes journie from Patomacke...and living within foure dayes journey of the Sea, had ships come into their river."¹ In 1621, the Patawomeck lived in the southwestern fringe of Tsenacommacah, on the south bank of the Potomac River near the fall line. Because they were so far inland, they were nearer to overland trade routes than other people within Tsenacommacah. Indigenous traders using the Great Indian Warpath, an arterial overland trade-route that ran from Canada to Florida and branched into the Mississippi Valley, likely delivered the box to the Patawomeck after obtaining it from Spanish sailors in the Gulf of Mexico.² The English Lieutenant who heard the story of the China box reported it to his superiors because the story of its coming from a sea beyond the mountains seemed to suggest a much-sought-after route to the Pacific Ocean might be nearby to Virginia. While the story of the China box is often cited to point out that English hopes of a 30-day trip to the Pacific were fallacious, the box's appearance in Tsenacommacah may say more about indigenous trade and knowledge than English reconnoitering. The box's arrival in Virginia from the Far East through Spanish imports in the Gulf of Mexico, its passing into

¹ Samuel Purchas, *Hakluytus Posthumus, or Purchas His Pilgrimes: Containing a History of the World in Sea Voyages and Land-Travels by Englishmen and Others*, 20 vols., vol. 19 (Glasgow: James MacLehose and Sons, 1905-1907), 151.

² It is not clear where the China Box came from; Helen Rountree speculates it came from Spanish Traders in Mobile Bay. Rountree, "The Powhatans and Other Woodland Indians as Travelers," 23, 33-35; Hatfield, *Atlantic Virginia: Intercolonial Relations in the Seventeenth Century*, 13-16.

Tsenacommacah by indigenous trade or gift, and its eventual discovery by an Englishman in 1621 demonstrates the interconnectedness of the world in general, and the Chesapeake in particular, during the early seventeenth century.³ Goods and information from the wider Atlantic (and Pacific) world moved throughout the Chesapeake and Tsenacommacah independently of and even before the English arrival in Virginia.

Because the English Lieutenant and his superiors who reported seeing the box insisted on seeing the indigenous peoples of Virginia as isolated rustics without wide-ranging trade networks, the appearance of a box from China was astonishing. Of course, Europeans and Africans had been widely dispersed throughout the Western Hemisphere for over one hundred years by the time an Englishman spotted the box in 1621. As they were relatively late to the colonial venture, the English expected, but never actually encountered, the kind of astonished Indians they had read about in Spanish accounts from one-hundred years earlier. Indeed, the Powhatans knew more about the English in 1607 than the English knew about Chesapeake Algonquians. Even today, the popular narrative insists on seeing Virginia's Algonquians as an isolated people before the arrival of the English, and in this interpretation isolation meant that the Powhatans were too slow to appreciate the lethal nature of their new English neighbors until it was too late. This chapter situates Tsenacommacah within what David Armitage calls a "Cis-Atlantic world."⁴ Armitage argues for a world in which the Powhatan were aware, if incompletely, of wider Atlantic connections, and used those connections for their own purposes.

³ Not to mention demonstrating something about the sturdiness of Chinese Cabinetmaking. Rountree, "The Powhatans and Other Woodland Indians as Travelers," 23, 33-35; Joseph Hall, "Between Old World and New: Oconee Valley Residents and the Spanish Southeast, 1540-1621," in *The Atlantic World and Virginia, 1550-1632*, ed. Peter C. Mancall (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 66-67.

⁴ Armitage and Braddick, *The British Atlantic World, 1500-1800*, 21-25.

The goal of this chapter is to demonstrate how connected and aware of this larger Atlantic world Tsenacommacah was in the protohistoric period (the time between initial contact and the more complete historical record of the Jamestown era). It will also establish the foundation for the argument that while Wahunsonacock's policy of engagement and interaction with the English ultimately failed to increase his own power, it was not an unreasonable or uninformed plan.

Historians tend to use the classification "Atlantic world" to suggest that they have an appreciation for the various reciprocal relationships among European, African and indigenous peoples that have been too often left out of imperial or national histories.⁵ Even so, most work on the Atlantic world focuses, perhaps necessarily, on the Europeans who actively connected that world through trade. For the Indigenous peoples of North America who lived on the edge of the Atlantic world, interaction, resistance or subordination to European colonists is often seen as reactive. Their actions often seem like little more than forced reactions to European prodding in one direction or another.⁶ At least in the early-contact Chesapeake, however, the decision to engage with the Atlantic world had more to do with indigenous agency than European power.

In the sparsely documented protohistoric period, it is difficult to estimate the limits of indigenous knowledge about the wider world. However, by the turn of the seventeenth century, most coastal indigenous peoples were not completely ignorant of Europeans and they knew something of the potential risks and benefits that came with contact. Wahunsonacock understood

⁵ Bushnell, "Indigenous America and the Limits of the Atlantic World, 1493-1825; Mancall, *The Atlantic World and Virginia, 1550-1624*, 2-8; Hatfield, *Atlantic Virginia: Intercolonial Relations in the Seventeenth Century*; Games, *The Web of Empire*; "Atlantic History: Definitions, Challenges, and Opportunities; Roper, *The English Empire in America, 1602-1658: Beyond Jamestown*, 7; Oberg, *Dominion and Civility : English Imperialism and Native America, 1585-1685*.

⁶ Bushnell, "Indigenous America and the Limits of the Atlantic World, 1493-1825," 194.

the power of knowledge. In the first years of Anglo-Powhatan contact, the paramount chief's knowledge of Europeans outstripped their knowledge of him, and he used this knowledge for political maneuvering. Soon after arriving in Virginia, the English commander Christopher Newport believed he had met and negotiated with Wahunsonacock and that he had expressed interest in friendly relations. In fact, the man Newport met was a local werowance and a son of the paramount chief. No Englishman would meet Wahunsonacock himself for seven more months, though he was certainly aware of their presence.⁷ As Daniel Richter points out, the process of discovery was first of "rumors and objects, not men and arms."⁸ European trade goods like the China box, as well as stories of traders, their weapons, actions and possibly their diseases, moved thousands of miles along indigenous trade routes.⁹ People far removed from personal contact with Europeans and Africans heard stories and began to form impressions of these newcomers sight-unseen. European's sporadic and often violent expeditions into North America in search of trade routes, gold, and slaves reverberated with peoples who were far removed from the initial shock and violence of personal confrontations with Europeans.

By 1607, Wahunsonacock knew that Europeans were visiting his shores with increasing regularity. There is some evidence that Wahunsonacock knew enough of Europeans to distinguish between the Spanish and English and knew of their rivalry.¹⁰ Jesuit missionaries and

⁷ Cave, *Lethal Encounters : Englishmen and Indians in Colonial Virginia*, 29.

⁸ Richter, *Facing East from Indian Country*, 11.

⁹ European diseases may have impacted populations far removed from contact with Europeans. However, recent work on "virgin soil epidemics" suggests that most of the diseases that devastated native populations in the sixteenth and seventeenth century did their work with the assistance of the human vectors of warfare and slavery, not purely as a function of their biological imperative. Paul Kelton, *Epidemics and Enslavement : Biological Catastrophe in the Native Southeast, 1492-1715*, Indians of the Southeast (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2007).

¹⁰ For example, in 1610, a Spanish spy in Virginia, Francisco Magnel noted that Wahunsonacock knew from Indigenous informants that the Europeans to the extreme south were Spanish. Magnel, "Report of What Francis Magnel, an Irishman, Learned in the State of Virginia During the Eight Months That He Was There, 1 July 1610."

their Spanish retainers came to the Chesapeake at least seven times between 1566 and 1588, and planners for the lost colony of Roanoke had visited and were even destined for the Chesapeake when weather and impatience redirected them to the Carolina barrier islands.¹¹ Untold encounters with European sailors, explorers, and slavers are hinted at in the records. For example, the only surviving account of a 1546 meeting in the Chesapeake between a European ship and a fleet of “over thirty canoes in each of which were fifteen or twenty persons with bows and arrows” comes from an English cabin boy called John. John’s deposition regarding the “very good bay” at 37° in La Florida survives only because in 1559 he happened to be in Campeche at the same time as the Spanish official tasked with organizing plans to oust French pirates from the Carolinas. The Spanish recorded John’s testimony as the only sailor in town who had been to the far north of La Florida before.¹² Interestingly, John, who was probably on a French ship when he travelled north, indicated that he had been part of the crew of a ship planning to raid the Spanish fleet. However, when the weather assailed his ship, the French ship changed their plan to trading with the local people in the Chesapeake. The “thirty canoes” that came to meet the French ship were loaded not only with people but with “as many as a thousand marten skins in exchange for knives, fishhooks and shirts.” That the Chesapeake canoeists came out to meet John’s boat so well-prepared for trade suggests that even in 1549, this was not their first encounter with Europeans.¹³

¹¹ Clifford Merle Lewis, Albert J. Loomie, and Virginia Historical Society., *The Spanish Jesuit Mission in Virginia, 1570-1572* (Chapel Hill,: Published for the Virginia Historical Society by the University of North Carolina Press, 1953).

¹² Ibid., 12-14; Rountree, *Pocahontas's People: The Powhatan Indians of Virginia through Four Centuries*, 15.

¹³ Lewis, Loomie, and Virginia Historical Society., *The Spanish Jesuit Mission in Virginia, 1570-1572*, 13; David B. Quinn, *England and the Discovery of America: 1481-1620* (New York: Alfred A Knopf, 1974), 190.

Similarly, John Smith reported that while being held captive by the Powhatan in 1607 they presented him to the leader of the Toppahannocks, a nation on the Rappahannock River, who suspected he might be the same European visitor who had feigned friendship and then killed their leader and taken several people captive one year earlier. (The Powhatans absolved Smith of the crime because the leader of the kidnapping mission had been a “great man,” while Smith was only about 5’4”.)¹⁴ Before they kidnapped the Toppahannocks, Wahunsonacock received and entertained the European visitors. It remains unclear who the Europeans were; as with many other visits to Tsenacommacah between 1500-1607, no European records of the incident exist.¹⁵ By 1607 Wahunsonacock and his werowances must have been aware that Tsenacommacah lay on the far-rim of a new Atlantic world full of potential and danger.

Paquiquineo and Ajacán

While Europeans may have visited the Chesapeake even before John’s visit in 1549, the first evidence that the Powhatans interacted directly with Europeans comes from 1561. In that year, a Spanish expedition to the North Carolina Banks captured a boy who was visiting from the Chesapeake. The boy, called Paquiquineo, was an elite visitor from a part of the Chesapeake that was almost certainly within the boundaries of Tsenacommacah.¹⁶ Just where exactly Paquiquineo

¹⁴ Smith, "A True Relation [1608]," 51; Rountree and III, *Before and after Jamestown : Virginia's Powhatans and Their Predecessors*, 53.

¹⁵ David B. Quinn suggests that the Samuel Mace may have captained the ship of kidnappers in 1603. Unfortunately, no records of Mace’s voyage survive, though Quinn points out that Mace’s kidnapping may explain a documented case of Indians giving a canoe demonstration in the Thames River in 1603. Quinn, *England and the Discovery of America: 1481-1620*, 428-29. Rountree, *Pocahontas's People: The Powhatan Indians of Virginia through Four Centuries*, 24; David B. Quinn, *New American World: A Documentary History of North America to 1612*, 5 vols., vol. 5 (New York: Arno Press, 1979), 166; Alden T. Vaughn, *Transatlantic Encounters: American Indians in Britain, 1500-1776* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 42-44.

¹⁶ Lewis, Loomie, and Virginia Historical Society., *The Spanish Jesuit Mission in Virginia, 1570-1572*, 58-62; Richter, "Tsenacommacah and the Atlantic World," 36.

came from within the politics and geography of Tsenacommacah is a subject of extensive debate, but it seems clear that he was from the ruling class, either the son of a werowance or related to Wahunsonacock himself.¹⁷ When Paquiquineo returned to Tsenacommacah baptized and bearing the new name Don Luis, he brought with him a thorough understanding of Spanish technology, religion, and how other indigenous peoples fit into the Spanish imperial system.

In the 1560s, Spanish planners believed that the *Bahia de Santa Maria* (Chesapeake Bay) led to a waterway called the Strait of Anian that led across the interior of North America to the Pacific Ocean, crossing nearby the silver mines of Northern Mexico. Thus, controlling the Chesapeake would allow the Spanish to protect their mainland claims and shipping routes, as well as help protect Spanish mining operations in Northern Mexico.¹⁸ In 1565, the Spanish *Adelanto* for Florida, Pedro Menendez de Aviles, wrote to King Philip II that he intended to found a small military settlement on the Chesapeake Bay to control the waterway and bring the Indians there into the Spanish Empire.¹⁹ The same year, Alonso de Arellano discovered the prevailing winds of the Manila-Acapulco route that propelled his ship from the Philippines to New Spain, stretching the Spanish presence across the globe. With this discovery, Spanish

¹⁷ Some historians have argued that Paquiquineo grew up to be Opechancanough, Wahunsonacock's brother and eventual successor. There is little evidence to suggest Paquiquineo and Opechancanough were the same person. While it is true they both attacked European settlers after first feigning friendship, they both had good reasons. Asserting that they are the same person explains for English apologists why Opechancanough was so hostile to the English colonists, he learned it from the Spanish. Of course, by 1622, Opechancanough had plenty of his own reasons to despise the English. Rountree and III, *Before and after Jamestown : Virginia's Powhatans and Their Predecessors*, 52-53; Helen C. Rountree, *Pocahontas, Powhatan, Opechancanough : Three Indian Lives Changed by Jamestown* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2005), 27-29; Richter, "Tsenacommacah and the Atlantic World," 37; Lewis, Loomie, and Virginia Historical Society., *The Spanish Jesuit Mission in Virginia, 1570-1572*, 58-62.

¹⁸ Charlotte M. Gradie, "The Powhatans in the Context of the Spanish Empire," in *Powhatan Foreign Relations: 1500-1722*, ed. Helen C. Rountree (Charlottesville: VA, 1993), 156-58.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 158; Lewis, Loomie, and Virginia Historical Society., *The Spanish Jesuit Mission in Virginia, 1570-1572*, 22-23.

concern with the Strait of Aninan waned, and the Chesapeake once again represented a distant outpost. Precisely because the Chesapeake was so distant, Jesuit missionaries believed it presented an ideal location for attempting to break with Spanish oversight and meddling in their missions around St. Augustine.

Whether the Spanish literally captured Paquiquineo or if he volunteered to travel with the Spanish on a fact-finding mission remains unclear.²⁰ In either case, Florida's *Adelanto* Menendez seemed to feel obligated to return Paquiquineo to his people. This, plus his treatment in Mexico, suggest Paquiquineo was not taken captive as a slave or potential translator, but as a kind of cultural ambassador. Paquiquineo called his homeland Ajacán, providing the Spanish name for what became Virginia. During his time abroad, the Dominicans in Mexico City taught him Spanish and the rudiments of Catholicism and Spanish civil life in preparation for his returning to assist missionaries with the conversion of the Powhatan.²¹ Historian Daniel Richter points out that Paquiquineo would have seen how the Spanish lived in Mexico City and how they extracted the labor of indigenous people to build their city on the conquered ruin of Tenochtitlan. Perhaps more importantly, he would have seen how indigenous leaders from outlying districts benefited from the Spanish occupation and how indigenous elites managed to maintain their positions within the new imperial system.²² In short, Paquiquineo saw both the incredible danger and promise that came with the Spanish.

²⁰ Richter, "Tsenacommacah and the Atlantic World," 37-39.

²¹ Gradie, "The Powhatans in the Context of the Spanish Empire," 167.

²² Richter, "Tsenacommacah and the Atlantic World," 39.

Paquiquineo lived among the Spanish for ten years, traveling to Cuba and Mexico and even met Philip II in Spain.²³ In 1566, a Spanish expedition to Ajacán brought Paquiquineo home. While it is unclear how much his input had to do with the Spanish decision to set up a mission in the Chesapeake, Paquiquineo's help was essential to the success of the mission. The 1566 expedition made up of Dominican missionaries and Spanish soldiers turned back when Paquiquineo claimed he was unable to recognize the coast of his home. Four years later, this time accompanied by only eight Jesuit missionaries and a young boy, Paquiquineo led a successful expedition back to his home in Ajacán.²⁴ The Jesuit missionaries, having rejected Spanish military protection, relied entirely upon the help of Paquiquineo.

In September 1570, only two days after arriving in the Chesapeake, Paquiquineo abandoned the missionaries, leaving them without a guide or interpreter. The ship that brought the missionaries and Paquiquineo to Tsenacommacah returned to Cuba with the only letter the missionaries managed to send. The letter made it clear that the Jesuits and Paquiquineo arrived during a drought and that the locals had little food to give the ill-provisioned Jesuits. Still the missionaries were optimistic and reported being well-received by Paquiquineo's people despite the famine.²⁵ Despite their optimism, when a resupply ship arrived in spring, they found no missionaries, but saw Indians on the shore wearing their vestments.²⁶ In 1572, Menendez himself sailed to the Chesapeake and killed eight people in retribution for the missionaries, though he

²³ Lewis, Loomie, and Virginia Historical Society., *The Spanish Jesuit Mission in Virginia, 1570-1572*, 15-18.

²⁴ Gradie, "The Powhatans in the Context of the Spanish Empire," 168.

²⁵ "Letter of Luis De Quirós and Juan Baptista De Segura to Juan De Hinistroa, from Ajacán, September 12, 1570," in *The Spanish Jesuit Mission in Virginia: 1570-1572*, ed. Clifford M. Lewis and Albert J Loomie (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1953), 89.

²⁶ Francisco Sacchina, "Borgia, the Third Part of the History of the Society of Jesus," *ibid.*, ed. Clifford M. Lewis and Albert J. Loomie, 223-25; Lewis, Loomie, and Virginia Historical Society., *The Spanish Jesuit Mission in Virginia, 1570-1572*, 44.

could not get his hands on Paquiquineo. He also brought back the sole survivor of the Jesuit mission, a young Spanish boy named Alonso, along with an un-named Indian boy. Menendez planned to use both as interpreters in the future.²⁷

Alonso's testimony provides the only remaining evidence for what happened in *Ajacán*. Prominent scholar of the Powhatans Helen Rountree argues that Paquiquineo murdered the Jesuits as a path of least resistance after realizing that upon his return he would be criticized by one community or another for not living appropriately no matter what he did.²⁸ However, as Frederic Gleach points out, that kind of either/or thinking with rigid ethnic boundaries is a-historical for the time period. As Gleach points out, "for Don Luis, [Paquiquineo] the Spanish Jesuits have been brought into the Powhatan world and thus there is only one loyalty. Neither world is rejected; rather, they are united."²⁹ If loyalties were not a problem for Paquiquineo, it seems Daniel Richter is correct in arguing that the Jesuits did not survive because they brought almost nothing to trade and refused to do so when they had the chance. The leader of the Spanish mission reported in his letter back to Havana that soon after arriving in Ajacán, "by a bit of blundering (I don't know who on the ship did it) someone made some sort of a poor trade in food."³⁰ In his study of exchange relationships during the early contact period, anthropologist Seth Mallios points out that this line implies the Spanish began their relationship with the Indians by giving or trading their goods liberally. Because the Spanish began so generously (poorly in

²⁷ Juan Rogel, "Letter of Juan Rogel to Francis Borgia, from the Bay of the Mother of God, August 28, 1572," in *The Spanish Jesuit Mission in Virginia: 1570-1572*, ed. S.J. Clifford M. Lewis and S.J. Albert J Loomie (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1953), 111.

²⁸ Rountree, *Pocahontas's People: The Powhatan Indians of Virginia through Four Centuries*, 17.

²⁹ Gleach, *Powhatan's World and Colonial Virginia: A Conflict of Cultures*, 94.

³⁰ "Letter of Luis De Quirós and Juan Baptista De Segura to Juan De Hinistrosa, from Ajacán, September 12, 1570," 92.

the mind of the missionaries), their later insistence on close trading and receiving gifts seemed an abrupt change and likely inflamed tensions.³¹ The Spanish refusal or inability to engage in a reciprocal relationship sealed their fate. In the letter the Jesuits sent soon after arriving, they mentioned that one of Paquiquineo's brothers, a little boy of three, was sick and that they dispatched someone to baptize the boy. If the Jesuits failed in their trade responsibilities, and if their ritual failed to save the sick boy, Paquiquineo's kinsmen likely saw no use for the demanding Jesuits.³²

In the aftermath of the failure at Ajacán, the Spanish believed there had never been any chance of success and that Paquiquineo had lied from the beginning. When writing about the incident some thirty years later in 1600, Brother Juan de la Carrera wrote that as soon as the ship that brought the party to Ajacán left to return to Havana, Paquiquineo abandoned them to live with his people and "began to indulge in vices and sins publicly without fear of God or man" and "allowed himself free rein in his sins, marrying many women in a pagan way."³³ While it is possible that, as Carrera suggested, Paquiquineo's promises about Ajacán were all just an elaborate ruse to get him back home and that he harbored murder in his heart the entire time he was abroad, it seems more likely that Paquiquineo brought the Spanish to Tsenacommacah in good faith, expecting them to provide trade goods and serve as a source of spiritual power. Only

³¹ Seth Mallios, *The Deadly Politics of Giving: Exchange and Violence at Ajacan, Roanoke, and Jamestown* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2006), 56-57.

³² Richter, "Tsenacommacah and the Atlantic World," 41-42.

³³ Alonso's story of what happened in Virginia got more exaggeratedly violent as time passed, either by his own retelling or by the clergy recording them. It is also worth mentioning that Alonso did not witness the deaths of the Friars but only heard about them later. Gleach, *Powhatan's World and Colonial Virginia: A Conflict of Cultures*, 91-92. "Relation of Juan De La Carrera Sent to Bartolome Perez, S.J., from Puebla De Los Angeles, March 1, 1600," in *The Spanish Jesuit Mission in Virginia: 1570-1572*, ed. Clifford E. Lewis and Albert J. Loomie (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1953), 134.

after the Jesuits made too many demands of Paquiquineo's people and failed to reciprocate as expected were they killed.³⁴

Even after the Jesuits were killed, the dense indigenous population in the Chesapeake plain continued to tempt Spanish authorities. Fr. Juan Rogel, who accompanied Menendez on his 1572 expedition, noted in a letter he wrote while in the Chesapeake, "there are far more people... than in any of the other lands I have seen so far along the coast explored... the natives are more settled than in other regions." To Rogel, this seemed to suggest that further attempts at missionization might be successful, but after the punitive expedition of 1572, Spanish efforts focused farther south with only a few occasional visits to the Chesapeake to drive out pirates or foreign, European, settlements.³⁵ The Spanish returned at least once. In 1588, Vicente Gonzales led a naval expedition looking for French interlopers that explored both sides of the Bahia Santa Maria. Gonzales reported that he met with the leader of "a large tribe who rules all the chiefs of that region" who was probably the leader of the Patuxent people who lived across the Potomac to the north of Tsenacommacah.³⁶ Whether the leader of Tsenacommacah knew about this visit or not remains unclear, but the two peoples were sometimes allied and the Powhatans shared a language and culture with the Patuxent people.³⁷

While the Spanish experiment in the Chesapeake was all but over in 1572, the Powhatans gained valuable knowledge from ambassadors like Paquiquineo, as well as from violent

³⁴ James Horn, *A Land as God Made It: Jamestown and the Birth of America* (New York: Basic Books, 2005), 7-10; Richter, "Tsenacommacah and the Atlantic World," 43; Mallios, *The Deadly Politics of Giving: Exchange and Violence at Ajacan, Roanoke, and Jamestown*, 37-57.

³⁵ Lewis, Loomie, and Virginia Historical Society., *The Spanish Jesuit Mission in Virginia, 1570-1572*, 161, 95.

³⁶ Vincente Gonzales, "Relation of Vicente Gonzales," in *The Spanish Jesuit Mission in Virginia: 1570-1572*, ed. Clifford E. Lewis and Albert J Loomie (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1953), 195, 97.n. 4

³⁷ Wayne E. Clark and Helen C. Rountree, "The Powhatans and the Maryland Mainland," in *Powhatan Foreign Relations: 1500-1722*, ed. Helen C. Rountree (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1993), 112-16.

exchanges with men like Menendez. Because of their distant location and Spanish contingencies, they were not seriously threatened by Spanish encroachment in the late sixteenth century. After the Spanish withdrawal, Tsenacommacah had time to consider carefully how to deal with Europeans without being overwhelmed. Historian Charlotte Gradie argues that the lack of cooperation between civil and religious authorities in Spanish North America and changes in Spanish colonial plans for North America allowed the Powhatan to expand their own imperial venture undisturbed by European interlopers for thirty years after the incident with Paquiquineo.³⁸ The Spanish *entrada* into Ajacán meant that twenty-five years before the arrival of the Jamestown settlers, the people of the Chesapeake had been exposed to the power of European weapons, European religion, and European trade goods, and one of them had even been entertained at court by King Phillip II. By the arrival of the first English explorers looking for a place to plant a colony, at least one man in Tsenacommacah had already traveled throughout the Spanish Empire and knew a great deal about how Europeans thought and what they might provide. The English did not seem to know about the Spanish efforts in the Chesapeake and do not mention them in any contemporary reports, though both Wahunsonacock and Opechancanough were of an age that they would have heard and may have even witnessed, or taken part in the events at Ajacán.

Roanoke and the English

In the twenty-five years after the Spanish abandoned Ajacán as a mission site, Europeans came through Tsenacommacah with some regularity and a few even stayed long enough to leave

³⁸ Charlotte M. Gradie, "The Powhatans in the Context of the Spanish Empire," *ibid.*, ed. Helen C. Rountree (VA), 155.

written records. English encroachments into Tsenacommacah and surrounding areas during the protohistoric period further shaped how Wahunsonacock and his indigenous subordinates thought about and engaged with Europeans and the Atlantic world they inhabited.

The English became interested in the Chesapeake when their colonial efforts elsewhere failed. Early English colonization efforts seem confused in retrospect, as the English attempted to simultaneously employ both a trade-based, accommodationist style of colonialism as well as an imperial, Spanish-style colonialism. Historians David Quinn and Nicholas Canny argue that Ireland was the testing-ground for English colonialism before it came to America and that the English equated the Irish and Indians, thus attempting to dominate both in similar ways.³⁹ However, Joyce Chaplin suggests that sporadic English encounters with indigenous peoples such as the sixteenth-century Arctic voyages of Martin Frobisher had a greater impact on English perceptions of indigenous peoples than their failed attempt at Irish conquest.⁴⁰ Likewise, Philip Morgan cites English experiences in the Caribbean, particularly Bermuda, as particularly relevant in shaping English opinions of Indians.⁴¹ Moreover, as Allison Games points out, the sixteenth-century English re-conquest of Ireland failed, so a conscious attempt to emulate that failure seems unlikely. Instead, in Virginia, the accommodationist style of English traders in the Mediterranean and Far East existed alongside the imperial style of conquest practiced in sixteenth-century Ireland.⁴² English soldiers in early America often began their military careers

³⁹ Nicholas P. Canny, "The Ideology of English Colonization: From Ireland to America," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 30, no. 4 (October, 1973); David B. Quinn, "Englishmen and Others," in *European Approaches to North America, 1450-1640* (Brookfield: Ashgate, 1998).

⁴⁰ Joyce Chaplin, "Natural Philosophy and an Early Racial Idiom in North America: Comparing English and Indian Bodies," *William and Mary Quarterly* 54, no. 1 (1997).

⁴¹ Philip Morgan, "Virginia's Other Prototype: The Caribbean," in *The Atlantic World and Virginia, 1550-1624*, ed. Peter C. Mancall (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press 2007), 364.

⁴² Games, *The Web of Empire*, 123.

in Ireland, and their experiences there influenced their behavior in the Chesapeake. However, the English strategy in America was different, and initially based on trade. English merchants hoped to insert themselves into foreign markets with subtlety and an eye on the bottom line, not conquest. These new global merchants were by necessity malleable and good at improvisation, both characteristics that helped them develop profitable, personal connections with commercial interests around the world.⁴³ Steven Potter suggests the English unwittingly settled “in the midst of one of the most politically complex Indian groups along the Atlantic coast,” though as Kupperman points out, the English were headed for the Chesapeake based on reports from the Roanoke voyages.⁴⁴ April Lee Hatfield goes even further, suggesting that the English headed for the Chesapeake because they meant to settle somewhere with a well-organized political and economic organization in order to trade and extract tribute.⁴⁵ Still, as Games points out, the English experience in Virginia was so different from their earlier experiences that the lessons learned in the Mediterranean and elsewhere “failed to resonate.”⁴⁶

English and Powhatan attitudes towards one another are difficult to gloss before 1607. Early English explorers seldom wrote about the indigenous peoples they met in simple terms. Their writing instead shows the strain of their struggle to explain to an uncomprehending English audience just what kind of challenges and opportunities America presented.⁴⁷ Indirect and sporadic experiences shaped English expectations: reading Spanish accounts, overly optimistic promotional literature, and sporadic contacts with indigenous peoples ranging from the Arctic to

⁴³ Ibid., 83.

⁴⁴ Potter, *Commoners, Tribute, and Chiefs : The Development of Algonquian Culture in the Potomac Valley*, 1.

⁴⁵ Hatfield, *Atlantic Virginia: Intercolonial Relations in the Seventeenth Century*, 230-31, n.1

⁴⁶ Games, *The Web of Empire*, 134.

⁴⁷ Kupperman, *Indians and English : Facing Off in Early America*, 11.

Guiana. Because their expectations were drawn from such diverse snippets, the overwhelming attitude was one of uncertainty and fear.⁴⁸ Conversely, the people living in Tsenacommacah likely met the English in 1607 with an attitude of confidence and even superiority.

Wahunsonacock was aware of the English efforts to colonize the North Carolina coast 150 miles to the south of Tsenacommacah, and he was aware of the failure of those efforts. Even so, the English Roanoke voyages forced the Powhatans to begin thinking carefully about what their place would be in a wider Atlantic world even before the English boats arrived at Jamestown.

The English experiment in Virginia began in earnest with Humphrey Gilbert and his half-brother Walter Raleigh. In 1587, Humphrey Gilbert received a patent to colonize the coast of North America. At the same time, Raleigh was in law school being exposed to the works of English colonial booster, Richard Hakluyt. In 1583, Gilbert died at sea after attempting to found a colony in Newfoundland. In 1584, Elizabeth I granted Raleigh the monopoly on colonization in America that had lapsed after Gilbert's death. Raleigh, who had been participating in the conquest of Ireland, shifted his focus to dealing with his new patent. He now had responsibility for acting as a clearinghouse for all English voyages intent on settling in North America south of Newfoundland. Raleigh shifted the focus of English settlement from the far north to the Carolina Outer Banks. The decision reflected a shift in the English colonial plan, from one of settlement colonies in the Spanish model to small-scale colonies designed both to export natural resources and to serve as a base for harassing Spanish shipping.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ Ibid; "English Perceptions of Treachery, 1583-1640: The Case of the American 'Savages'," *The Historical Journal* 20, no. 2 (1977).

⁴⁹ Kupperman, *Roanoke : The Abandoned Colony*, 2nd ed. (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2007), 11-12.

The founding of Roanoke was dependent on privateering, and the needs of privateering determined its location, early population, and relationships with indigenous peoples. A base in the Americas meant that the pirating season, between the early spring and late summer when the chance of winter storms and hurricanes was lower, could last longer. Indeed, the eventual settlement location of Roanoke Island makes no sense, except as a hidden base for piracy. By the mid-1580s, English investors learned that what made colonies pay was privateering, not marketing the products of America. While some colonial planners saw the limitations of building such a blatantly parasitic empire, privateering paid for larger, settlement-based colonial schemes. In the sixteenth century, the interests of the privateers and the sea dominated the interests of the colonists and the land.⁵⁰ Planners such as Richard Hakluyt, who thought colonization should be based on self-sustaining settlements that enriched English influence on the world stage, tried to keep the settlement side of colonization alive during the heady days of privateering. In many ways, the proto-mercantilism espoused by the Hakluyts anticipated what the English colonial model eventually became.

In 1584, a ship arrived off the coast of North Carolina to reconnoiter the best place to locate a colony. The English ship brought two Indians, Manteo and Wanchese, back to London, to testify on the receptivity of the local people. Walter Raleigh instructed Wanchese and Manteo in English and planned to use them as translators. More importantly, while with the English, Wanchese and Manteo explained the political and cultural landscape of the Outer Banks and taught some of their language to the polymath and mapmaker Thomas Harriot. Harriot's ethnographic writings and the paintings of artist John White, both of whom actually went to the

⁵⁰ Ibid., 24.

Outer Banks, remain the best sources for information about the Algonquian peoples of that region during the contact period.⁵¹ Even so, Harriot wrote his observations about indigenous social and political organizations to help explain whether or not the local people would accept the English presence, and how to best manipulate them if they did. Thus, these sources must be considered critically.⁵²

The two Algonquian visitors to England were from different polities, but similar cultures. Wanchese was from Roanoke and Manteo was from Croatoan, an island just north of Roanoke now called Hatteras Island. Both men returned to the Outer Banks one year later, but after their return, they had very different attitudes towards their English neighbors. Manteo remained with the English, serving as a critical guide and interpreter until he disappeared with the lost colonists in 1587. Unlike Manteo, Wanchese quickly abandoned the English upon his return and helped orchestrate the attacks that led to their removal from Roanoke.⁵³ As Michael Oberg points out, explaining why Wanchese and Manteo had such dramatically different reactions to the English, even after they both visited London, reveals something about how Indians viewed the English and the Atlantic world they inhabited.⁵⁴

⁵¹ Peter C. Mancall, *Hakluyt's Promise: An Elizabethan's Obsession for an English America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 196-204; Alden T. Vaughn, "Sir Walter Raleigh's Indian Interpreters, 1584-1618," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 59, no. 2 (April, 2002).

⁵² Kupperman, *Roanoke : The Abandoned Colony*, 48. Harriot expressed a conservative longing in writing about Indian society. The moral economy and cooperation evident in Indian society reminded them of a passing, mythic England that the rise of capitalism was eroding. Ibid., 59-60.

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⁵⁴ Michael Leroy Oberg, "Manteo and Wanchese in Two Worlds," in *Searching for the Lost Colonies: An Interdisciplinary Collection*, ed. E. Thomson Shields Jr. and Charles Robin Ewen (Raleigh: North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources, Office of Archives and History, 2003), 82.

Both Manteo and Wanchese were elite men from coastal Algonquian societies who were likely sent to England to learn more about the English as potential trading partners.⁵⁵ The precise relationship between their two peoples remains unclear, but Wanchese was an advisor to the chief Wingina. And, as Manteo was in Roanoke when the English arrived, he was likely well suited to his diplomatic position in England. After their year in England, Manteo and Wanchese returned to the Outer Banks in 1585 with a military expedition led by the disagreeable Ralph Lane. A veteran of the Irish conquest, Lane established a fort on Roanoke Island with 107 men. Lane thought the location of Roanoke was a good temporary base for launching raids against Spanish shipping, but the harbor's shallowness forced Lane to scout for better locations. In the winter of 1585-86, Lane sent an expedition north. The group found a large deep-water bay and spent the winter living with a friendly group on the Elizabeth River who gave the bay its English name, the Chesapeake. After the northern expedition returned, Lane sent an additional expedition to the West, this time into North Carolina's great Albemarle Sound and the black water of the Chowan River. There the English met the Chowanoc people and again established good relations. After returning to Roanoke, however, relations with the local people quickly deteriorated.

The indigenous people welcomed Ralph Lane on his first visit, but frequent colonial insults changed their response from accommodation to vengeance. English demand for food hit the local Algonquians hard in 1585-6. At the same time, people were dying at an incredible rate in the Outer Banks because of European disease. Thomas Harriot summed up the death toll as

⁵⁵ Ibid., 83.

“in truth very manie in respect of their numbers.”⁵⁶ The powerful technology of English, their trade goods, and the deadly diseases they brought with them impressed all the Algonquians of the Outer Banks with their power. However, the indigenous population did not agree on whether that power should be harnessed or shunned. As violence escalated, the English beheaded a local chief, Wingina, and lost the support of the people on whom they depended for food.⁵⁷ By March 1586, Ralph Lane worried that the Indians could make war by “withdrawing,” indicating that he understood the extremely dependent relationship the English had with the Carolina Algonquians but not how to prevent its deterioration.⁵⁸ The murder of Wingina was likely the final straw that turned the indigenous people of Roanoke against the English.⁵⁹ Wanchese, viewing the English as the source of trouble, removed his people to the mainland, abandoning the English to starve except for occasional military raids to speed along their demise.⁶⁰ With no local support, Lane and his men abandoned the colony in June of 1586 when Sir Francis Drake, on his way back to England after prowling the Caribbean, happened by to check on their progress.

Manteo and Wanchese represent two opposite extremes for how Algonquian peoples with little prior experience with Europeans dealt with newcomers from England. Manteo, by all accounts, never wavered in his support of the English, despite their breaches of protocol and violation of kinship ties. Croatoan escaped the harshest treatment by Lane and his men, which may help explain why the promise of an English alliance never soured for Manteo. Wanchese

⁵⁶ Thomas Harriot, "A Briefe and True Report of the New Found Land of Virginia," in *The Roanoke Voyages 1584-1590: Documents to Illustrate the English Voyages to North America under the Patent Granted to Walter Raleigh in 1584*, ed. David B. Quinn (London: The Hakluyt Society, 1952), 378.

⁵⁷ Michael Leroy Oberg, *The Head in Edward Nugent's Hand: Roanoke's Forgotten Indians*, ed. Daniel K. Richter and Kathleen M. Brown, Early American Studies (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008).

⁵⁸ David B. Quinn, *Set Fair for Roanoke: Voyages and Colonies, 1584-1606* (Chapel Hill: Published for America's Four Hundredth Anniversary Committee by the University of North Carolina Press, 1985), 124.

⁵⁹ Oberg, *The Head in Edward Nugent's Hand: Roanoke's Forgotten Indians*, 96.

⁶⁰ Lane, "17 August 1585-18 June 1586, Ralph Lane's Discourse on the First Colony," 280-81.

and his chief Wingina, while also initially impressed with English power, came to see it as an evil that should be shunned and removed, not harnessed or manipulated.⁶¹ It took under a year for Wanchese and his people to realize that the promise of English trade did not outweigh the horror it brought to his people. In the end, he successfully removed the English threat. Farther north in Tsenacommacah, Wahunsonacock did not come to the same conclusion. Operating from a position of greater authority and un-assailed by the same level of disease as his Algonquian cousins on the Outer Banks, Wahunsonacock, attempted to walk a line between the approaches of Maneto (submission) and Wanchese (resistance), opting instead for control.⁶²

The Lost Colonists and the Chesapeakes

After Wanchese drove the English away from Roanoke, Raleigh and his backers directed their attention towards the friendly Chesapeakes and the deep-water bay Lane's lieutenants had discovered in the winter of 1585.⁶³ In the spring of 1587, another colonial venture set out from England, this time headed for the Chesapeake. In an effort to prevent the failures of the Roanoke Colony, the backers filled the ships with settler families, not soldiers. Led by John White, the artists who had accompanied Raleigh's earlier attempt, as well as the Croatoan interpreter Manteo, one hundred and seventeen men, seventeen women, and nine boys arrived in North Carolina in July of 1587. The colony was mostly single men, though there were also eleven married couples, and two couples with one child each. Four men brought their sons or younger brothers. There were six single women and three children with no apparent relatives. All the

⁶¹ Oberg, "Manteo and Wanchese in Two Worlds," 86-87.

⁶² Mallios, *The Deadly Politics of Giving: Exchange and Violence at Ajacan, Roanoke, and Jamestown*, 79.

⁶³ *The Roanoke Voyages, 1584-1590: Documents to Illustrate the English Voyages to North America under the Patent Granted to Walter Raleigh in 1584*, 2 vols., Hakluyt Society Second Series (London: Hakluyt Society, 1955), 494; Quinn, *Set Fair for Roanoke: Voyages and Colonies, 1584-1606*, 248-49.

children were boys, one of whom was so young he was still nursing. Famously, two children were born once they arrived, Virginia Dare (John White's grandchild) and a Harvey child.⁶⁴ Fourteen of the colonists had been involved in earlier expeditions to Virginia, and seven of Ralph Lane's first expedition returned with the new colony.⁶⁵ On the way to the Chesapeake, the ships carrying White's one hundred and seventeen colonists stopped by Roanoke Island to pick up a small retainer of English men who had been left behind. A resupply ship deposited the men on Roanoke shortly after Lane hitched a ride home with Francis Drake, unaware that the main English force had already abandoned the island - casualties of long travel times and no communication. However, when White's ship arrived at Roanoke, the men were nowhere to be found (likely killed by Wanchese) and, more worrisome to White, the ship's Captain, Simon Fernandez, refused to transport the colonists any farther, abandoning them on Roanoke in order to make time for pirating in the Caribbean.⁶⁶

It soon became clear that the locals on Roanoke were no more interested in White's new colony than they had been with Lane's. The colonists suffered attacks and encountered Indians maimed by Lane's men. White tried to start over and build good relations, but no one showed up for a meeting of forgiveness he proposed.⁶⁷ Outraged over the loss of several of his men, in August 1587 White led a nighttime raid against what he thought were hostile Roanokes. Instead, White's attack fell on a group of the last Indians in the region willing to speak with the English,

⁶⁴ William S. Powell, "Who Came to Roanoke?," in *Searching for the Roanoke Colonies: An Interdisciplinary Collection*, ed. E. Thomson Shields Jr. and Charles R. Ewen (Raleigh: Office of Archives and History North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources, 2003), 50.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 52.

⁶⁶ Kupperman, *Roanoke : The Abandoned Colony*, 105-18; Oberg, "Manteo and Wanchese in Two Worlds," 89.

⁶⁷ John White, "John White's Narrative of His Voyage," in *The Roanoke Voyages: 1584-1590*, ed. David B. Quinn (New York: Dover Publications, 1955 [1587]), 527.

Manteo's Croatoan friends.⁶⁸ Now completely isolated, disillusioned and in danger, the colonists sent White back to England to organize a relief mission to take them the rest of the way to the Chesapeake. War with Spain prevented White's return for three years, and when he finally returned the colonists were gone, leaving no trace except the letters "CRO" carved on a tree. White suspected that the letters indicated that the colonists had gone northward to Croatoan Island to wait for him among Manteo's people. Again, impatient sailors upset White's plans and he was unable to follow through on any extant clues as to the colony's fate. All of White's later attempts to return to North Carolina and continue the search proved futile and the fate of the lost colonists remains unknown.⁶⁹

The prevailing theory about what happened to the lost colony is that the survivors headed north to live with the friendly Chesapeakes, as had been the original plan.⁷⁰ Recall that in the winter of 1585-86 a group of colonists from Roanoke, including Thomas Harriot the scientist, had visited the lower Chesapeake Bay and lived among the "Chesepieans." Unfortunately, English accounts of the visit were lost, probably as a consequence of their classification as secret to prevent the Spanish knowing about their friendly relations with the Chesapeakes.⁷¹ While staying with the Chesapeakes, the English received visitors from many surrounding tribes, but, significantly, no visitors came from the core of Tsenacommacah. Wahunsonacock made no indication to the colonists at Jamestown that he knew about the English among the Chesapeakes,

⁶⁸ Ibid., 530.

⁶⁹ For an excellent summary of current theories regarding the Lost Colonists see: Kupperman, *Roanoke : The Abandoned Colony*.

⁷⁰ Quinn, *Set Fair for Roanoke : Voyages and Colonies, 1584-1606*, 345-53, Chapter 19; Kupperman, *Roanoke : The Abandoned Colony*, 176-77; Rountree, *Pocahontas's People: The Powhatan Indians of Virginia through Four Centuries*, 21; Oberg, *The Head in Edward Nugent's Hand: Ronaoko's Forgotten Indians*, 146.

⁷¹ *The Roanoke Voyages, 1584-1590: Documents to Illustrate the English Voyages to North America under the Patent Granted to Walter Raleigh in 1584*, 246.

though he did mention that the Chesapeakes were his enemy.⁷² Perhaps owing to their location near the mouth of the Chesapeake Bay and more frequent encounters with European traders, the Chesapeakes violently resisted the dominion of Tsenacommacah. They resisted successfully until a large group of potential European trading partners made landfall near the Chesapeakes in 1607. Wahunsonacock, or his priests, realized they could not afford to risk losing out to their Chesapeake rivals and attacked. If the Roanoke survivors were there when Wahunsonacock attacked and exterminated the Chesapeakes, any English among them were likely killed as well.⁷³

While Quinn and Kupperman are the established authorities on the Roanoke colony, and they both hold to the “flight northward to the Chesapeake” theory of what happened to the lost colonists, there are other credible interpretations. One recent interpretation is that the English fled to the northwest, to live among the Weapmeocs, the only nearby friendly tribe, and that both the English and the Weapmeocs were eventually absorbed into the Tuscaroras of North Carolina.⁷⁴ Another popular theory is that the colonists fled west and lived with the friendly Chowanocs, out of reach of the hostile groups near Roanoke, but within reach of Wahunsonacock who eventually had them killed.⁷⁵ Without solid archaeological evidence, it is difficult to say with certainty what happened to the lost colonists. While Wahunsonacock may not have had them killed, it seems likely that by the time more English colonists showed up in the Chesapeake in 1607, he knew all about the English failures at Roanoke. While the ultimate

⁷² Archer, "Relatyon of the Discovery of Our River," 106-07.

⁷³ Quinn, *Set Fair for Roanoke : Voyages and Colonies, 1584-1606*, 352-53, 62; Strachey, *The Historie of Travell into Virginia Britania* (1612), 91.

⁷⁴ Thomas C. Parramore, "The "Lost Colony" Found: A Documentary Perspective," *The North Carolina Historical Review* 78, no. 1 (2001).

⁷⁵ Horn, *A Land as God Made It: Jamestown and the Birth of America*, 145-46.

fate of the Roanoke colonists can be endlessly debated, their significance lies in providing the Powhatan leader with experience among English colonists. Unfortunately for Wahunsonacock, the small number of colonists and their failure to return failed to prepare him for the endless stream of Englishmen who would arrive at Jamestown.

Mysterious Attack at Cape Henry

On April 26, 1607 when the Jamestown-bound colonists first arrived off the coast of Virginia, a party including George Percy came ashore in the afternoon. By nightfall, a group of bowmen attacked the party, but was driven away by “the sharpness of [their] shott.”⁷⁶ The English came ashore at Cape Henry, within the territory of the Chesapeakes. The violent greeting the English received was confusing because the Chesapeakes were supposed to be friendly. The colonists picked the Chesapeake largely based on the earlier accounts from Roanoke that the Chesapeake was home to a group of powerful and friendly Indians. Clearly something had changed in the intervening twenty years.⁷⁷ In examining the theories explaining the attack at Cape Henry, something of how the Powhatans and their Algonquian neighbors engaged with the English and the Atlantic world emerges.

Eminent Roanoke historian David Quinn argues that Powhatans, acting under orders from Wahunsonacock, attacked the English at Cape Henry in an attempt to cover up the recent destruction of the Chesapeake tribe and their English refugee guests. For Quinn, the Indian attack in April of 1607 was the Powhatan leader’s attempt to both keep the English from

⁷⁶ George Percy, "Observations Gathered out of a Discourse of the Plantation of the Southern Colonie in Virginia by the English 1606," *The Jamestown Voyages Under the First Charter* 2nd. ser., no. 136 (1969 [1608]): 134.

⁷⁷ *The Roanoke Voyages, 1584-1590: Documents to Illustrate the English Voyages to North America under the Patent Granted to Walter Raleigh in 1584*, 494.

discovering that he had recently had their countrymen killed, as well as to shunt the expedition closer to his home territory where he could keep an eye on them.⁷⁸ Quinn's primary evidence is largely based on two lines in the writings of William Strachey that suggest Wahunsonacock had the English killed at almost exactly the same time that the English arrived in the Chesapeake in 1607. Strachey reported that he heard from indigenous informants that Wahunsonacock had killed some English who for "20 and od years had peaceably lyved and intermixed with those Savadges" at precisely "what tyme this our Colony, (vnder the Conduct of Capt. Newport) landed within the Chesapeack Bay."⁷⁹ Quinn also cites as evidence a conversation John Smith allegedly had with Samuel Purchas in 1623, in which Smith reported that Wahunsonacock told him plainly that he had killed the Roanoke colonists. However, as Helen Rountree points out, Smith never wrote about the incident himself and Purchas published the alleged conversation in a fiercely anti-Indian polemic that brings its veracity into question.⁸⁰

Rountree presents a different case. She argues that the people who attacked the English at Cape Henry were not Powhatans, but the Chesapeakes themselves fearing English reprisal for having killed some of their countrymen.⁸¹ For Rountree, it seems unlikely Wahunsonacock was particularly worried about the English finding their lost brethren among the Chesapeake he had recently exterminated, as the English were almost certainly already dead, or so thoroughly acculturated as to be unrecognizable. Rountree points out that both English and Algonquian men tended to be supremely ethnocentric and "touchy," as evidenced by the several explosions of

⁷⁸ Quinn, *Set Fair for Roanoke : Voyages and Colonies, 1584-1606*, 360-68.

⁷⁹ Strachey, *The Historie of Travell into Virginia Britania (1612)*, 91, 34.

⁸⁰ Rountree, *Pocahontas's People: The Powhatan Indians of Virginia through Four Centuries*, 21-22; Quinn, *Set Fair for Roanoke : Voyages and Colonies, 1584-1606*, 365.

⁸¹ Rountree, *Pocahontas's People: The Powhatan Indians of Virginia through Four Centuries*, 22-23.

violence over seemingly trivial matters at Roanoke and in Tsenacommacah. Thus, it seems unlikely that English men arriving in the Chesapeake, unlikely candidates for adoption in any case, could have refrained from acting like arrogant Englishmen well enough to survive.⁸² Likewise, any women and children who made their way to the Chesapeakes twenty years earlier would have been adopted and stripped of their English identities. Moreover, it is important to remember that the small group of English soldiers who reported good treatment after they wintered among the Chesapeakes traded liberally and did not stay long. The Roanoke refugees, on the other hand, likely offered nothing but dependence. Rountree suggests the Chesapeakes themselves shot at the English to prevent their recent killing of English refugees from being punished by the newly arrived English. The Chesapeakes may have remembered the executions dealt out by the Spanish in retribution for the 1572 killing of the Jesuit missionaries and hoped to avoid the same fate.

Both explanations have holes that cannot be filled with the available evidence. While Powhatans were eager to enter into the European trade, it seems unlikely Wahunsonacock was engaged in a plot to drive the English away from his enemies and closer to the heart of his paramouncy. To pull this off, he would have needed to know that the English were coming almost before they arrived and then acted incredibly quickly. Quinn's theory that Wahunsonacock killed the Chesapeakes and then posted lookouts throughout their territory to drive away any English that might happen to come looking for them seems unlikely, given the fact that he had no way of knowing when or if the English were coming in 1607.⁸³ Whether the

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Quinn, *Set Fair for Roanoke : Voyages and Colonies, 1584-1606*, 362.

Chesapeakes carried out the attack on the colonists at Cape Henry out of fear, or if the Powhatans attacked as part of a grand plot, the result remains the same, the English were shunted towards the Powhatans and subsequently allowed to stay within Tsenacommacah. In either case, the Powhatans under Wahunsonacock's leadership demonstrated greater awareness of the potential benefits the English brought than their domestic rivals. Either Wahunsonacock concocted a scheme to keep the English away from the rival Chesapeakes, demonstrating his acumen at manipulating the newcomers, or the Chesapeakes reacted violently to their arrival, indicating that they, like Wanchese and the Roanokes, were less able than the Powhatans to contain their fear of the English and attempt to exploit their arrival. In either case, the Powhatans under Wahunsonacock seem to have had a powerful combination of confidence and knowledge leading them to attempt to control, instead of repel the newcomers. This confidence, gleaned in part from several decades of experience with Europeans on the fringes of an Atlantic world, explains many of Wahunsonacock's actions in the early years of the English settlement at Jamestown.

Other Indigenous Rivals

For Wahunsonacock, it was not enough to engage the English as potential trading partners; he had to keep his indigenous rivals from engaging with them and using the benefits of that engagement against him. Wahunsonacock was not unique in his understanding of the potential power of the English, either as allies or subordinates, although he was one of the only indigenous rulers in the region who had the confidence to attempt to exploit the newcomers. While exploring the Chesapeake in the summer of 1608, John Smith reported being attacked by a group of Manahoacs. The Manahoacs were a Siouan-speaking group from the Piedmont, allied with the Monacans against the Powhatans. The English took a wounded Manahoac man prisoner,

questioned him and gained some knowledge of what the non-Algonquian people farther inland thought of the English. The wounded prisoner, Amoroleck, gave several details about indigenous politics in his region, but when asked why his people attacked the English, he responded that he heard the English were “a people come from under the world, to take their world from them.”⁸⁴ Jeffrey Hantaman, an anthropologist studying the Siouan-speaking peoples of Virginia suggests that Amoroleck’s response demonstrates that the Monacans and Manahoacs saw the English in cosmological terms as something to be avoided and feared as an “other.”⁸⁵

It should not be shocking that Wanchese and others were unwilling to engage the English on their terms. Nancy Oestreich Lurie points out that in early Virginia, the similarities between the English and Powhatan were greater than their differences, particularly when it came to evaluating outsiders. The power the Powhatans exerted over other tribes gave them a sense of ethnocentrism similar to the English and blinded them to the enormity of the threat presented by the English. There was little in the European bag of tricks that the Powhatans could not “syncretize with their own experience.” While the Powhatans were impressed with metal weapons and armor, they were merely new forms of familiar objects designed to accomplish familiar tasks. English nets, weirs and gardening implements were likewise similar. Tales of large English cities would probably have seemed similar to the late Mississippian cities with which the Powhatans were likely familiar.⁸⁶ Indeed, Paquiquinemeo, Wanchese, Maneto and many others made trips to Europe before 1607 and only Manteo came back with an

⁸⁴ Smith, "The Generall Historie of Virginia, New-England, and the Summer Isles," 175.

⁸⁵ Jeffrey L. Hantman, "Caliban's Own Voice: American Indian Views of the Other in Colonial Virginia," *New Literary History* 23, no. 1 (Winter, 1992): 78.

⁸⁶ Nancy Oestreich Lurie, "Indian Cultural Adjustment to European Civilization," in *Seventeenth-Century America: Essays in Colonial History*, ed. James Morton Smith (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1959), 39.

overwhelmingly positive report. Most indigenous visitors to England came back with complex attitudes, they were impressed by the size of buildings, for example, and European weapons, but were disdainful of the poverty and overcrowding they found amidst splendor.⁸⁷ The points of difference on which Europeans felt superior did not mean much for the Powhatans: literacy, sexual mores, ideas of modesty, and Christianity. While most indigenous visitors to Europe found the things there impressive, they found the people less so. Powhatans at home shared this opinion upon seeing that the English foreigners still starved unless supported, despite their guns and ships.

Hantman argues Opechancanough, (Wahunsonacock's brother) who counselled violence against the English as a danger that should be exterminated shared the opinion of the Manahoacs.⁸⁸ Opechancanough, who eventually succeeded Wahunsonacock as paramount chief, never shared his brother's confidence and was always more hostile towards the newcomers. The Manahoacs' attitude is also similar to that of Wanchese and the Roanokes. Hantman goes on to contrast Amorolek's approach to the English with that of Wahunsonacock, who sought to engage the English in an effort to avoid domination. While Hantman is correct that the Siouan-speaking peoples of the piedmont avoided the English because they seemed too foreign to deal with and that Opechancanough saw the English as too dangerous to be left alive, Hantman oversimplifies Wahunsonacock's approach to the newly arrived English. Instead of seeing the English as an enemy that could be pacified with trade, the Powhatan leader used his experience dealing with Europeans to actively seek to include the English in his trade networks and incorporate them into

⁸⁷ Vaughn, *Transatlantic Encounters: American Indians in Britain, 1500-1776*, xiv, 46-47.

⁸⁸ Hantman, "Caliban's Own Voice: American Indian Views of the Other in Colonial Virginia," 78.

his realm. Moreover, Wahunsonacock was at pains to keep the English engaged *only* with him and not to lose the English and their powerful trade goods to his rivals, within and without Tsenacommacah.

Conclusions

As Daniel Richter points out, the aim of good Indian history should be to, “reorient our perspective on the continent’s past to alternate between the general and the personal, and to outline stories of North America during the period of European colonization rather than of the European colonization of North America.”⁸⁹ English colonialism in Virginia gained a foothold because the Powhatan paramount chief Wahunsonacock realized in 1607 that he was on the edge of a burgeoning and dangerous Atlantic world. Years of experience with Europeans and years of experience building the largest indigenous polity on the East Coast left Wahunsonacock with a keen understanding of the opportunities and dangers that Europeans presented.

As Cynthia Van Zandt points out, “belief in the pervasive reach of interconnections fed the fears and conspiracy theories that constantly circulated among Europeans and Native Americans [in early America.] Neither the fears nor the intercultural alliances that formed their basis stopped at regional or territorial borders, a fact easily missed in studies of single regions or cultures.”⁹⁰ Indeed, any attempt to discuss the indigenous responses to European contact glosses the complexities and histories of the different indigenous groups Europeans encountered in North America. At the turn of the twentieth century, James Mooney argued that the Powhatans hated

⁸⁹ Richter, *Facing East from Indian Country*, 9.

⁹⁰ Cynthia J. Van Zandt, *Brothers among Nations: The Pursuit of Intercultural Alliances in Early America, 1580-1660* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 13.

the English upon their arrival, though he admitted their hate was justified by the aggressive actions of earlier European visitors.⁹¹ By mid-century, Nancy Oestreich Lurie argued that hatred was an oversimplification of the Powhatans' attitude, noting that because of the aforementioned European aggression, the Powhatans were probably ready to see the English as hostile and ridiculous.⁹² More recent historians have asked if the Powhatans under Wahunsonacock were so filled with hate and derision at first contact, why did they allow Europeans to settle in their country? After all, the Powhatans were certainly powerful enough to have wiped out the English as they had the Chesapeake. Most historians now argue it was Wahunsonacock's desire for English trade goods that kept the English alive.⁹³ The next chapter argues that the reason the paramount chief allowed the English to settle in his country was a desire for English goods paled with anxiety. Not anxiety about the English themselves, but about the possibility of his indigenous rivals gaining steady access to Europeans instead of him. Given his earlier experiences with Europeans, Wahunsonacock believed he had little to fear from Europeans directly. The threat of English alliance with a domestic rival, however, was extremely threatening. The Powhatan leader's plans for Tsenacommacah incorporated all he knew about the English in Roanoke and the Spanish in Ajacán. As Ian K. Steele points out, "this crucial century of North American history was dominated by the interaction of Amerindians with one another and with the invading Europeans, rather than by European imperial or inter-colonial rivalries."⁹⁴ Wahunsonacock's interest in Europeans had been stoked by several decades of living on the fringes of an Atlantic world. In the native ground of Tsenacommacah, surrounded

⁹¹ James Mooney, "The Powhatan Confederacy, Past and Present," *American Anthropologist* 9, no. 1 (1907): 129.

⁹² Lurie, "Indian Cultural Adjustment to European Civilization," 36.

⁹³ Gallivan, *James River Chiefdoms: The Rise of Social Inequality in the Chesapeake*, 164; Cave, *Lethal Encounters: Englishmen and Indians in Colonial Virginia*, 37; Richter, "Tsenacommacah and the Atlantic World," 64.

⁹⁴ Ian K. Steele, *Warpaths: Invasions of North America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 23.

by indigenous rivals, engagement with Europeans was dangerous, but non-engagement could be even more dangerous. The next chapter explores the specifics of how the English fit into the economy of Tsenacommacah and why Wahunsonacock was willing to risk and tolerate so much to keep the English as his trading partners.

Chapter Three: Wahunsonacock's Weighting of English Wares

Wahunsonacock allowed the English to stay in Tsenacommacah in 1607 only because of their trade goods. The Choanokes, a large and powerful Algonquian chiefdom west of Albemarle Sound and about 100 miles south of Tsenacommacah, warned Ralph Lane about Wahunsonacock when he wintered among them in 1586. The Choanokes' werowance, Menatonon, told Lane of a nearby "powerful king who would be loth to suffer any stranger to enter into his Countrey...and that he was able to make a great many of men into the field, which he sayd would fight very well."¹ Besides his warning, Menatonon told Lane that Wahunsonacock sent Powhatans south in 1584 to trade Chesapeake Bay pearls for Choanoke copper, but Menatonon was unwilling to trade. Recalling Menatonon's story, the English brought copper and other trade goods with them when they set out for Tsenacommacah twenty years later in hopes that trading such a coveted material would ensure them a friendly welcome. Unfortunately, the English brought along copper in such quantities and traded so liberally that copper soon lost its value in Tsenacommacah, creating an economic and political problem for Wahunsonacock that he could not have anticipated.

This chapter examines the different careers of two trade goods in early Tsenacommacah, copper and beads, and argues that Powhatan acceptance of English copper and rejection of English beads reveals a relatively high level of cosmopolitan awareness and ethnocentrism among the Powhatans. Moreover, by examining how English goods fit into the prestige goods economy of Tsenacommacah, this chapter argues that Wahunsonacock kept the English alive

¹ Lane, "17 August 1585-18 June 1586, Ralph Lane's Discourse on the First Colony," 261; Kupperman, *Roanoke : The Abandoned Colony*, 75-77.

even after they became a clear threat to him because the realities of domestic politics within Tsenacommacah demanded the English not be expelled or killed.

The Prestige-Goods Economy of Tsenacommacah

Werowances (chiefs) in the Chesapeake plain inherited their positions, but chiefly authority based on inheritance was local and difficult to expand. To build a paramount chiefdom like Tsenacommacah required not just an inherited position, but spiritual power, material wealth and military might.² The word werowance itself is often translated as, “he is wealthy” and the werowances in Tsenacommacah were wealthy, but their wealth often came at the cost of submission to the mamatanowick, Wahunsonacock.³ In short, wealth held the paramount chiefdom of Tsenacommacah together. Tsenacommacah grew beyond the relatively small number of holdings Wahunsonacock inherited because he forced other chiefdoms into submission through violence, but he maintained that control through skillful use of a prestige-goods economy that tied together material goods, social rank, spiritual power, and diplomacy.⁴ As anthropologist Timothy Earle points out, “exchange [is] inherently organizational in its nature... material things used to satisfy, symbolize, and terrorize take on the force of social relations, but have a permanence and extension that the relationships themselves lack.”⁵ Accumulating and redistributing wealth through tribute systems allowed Wahunsonacock and his subordinate werowances to build and maintain control in Tsenacommacah. In Tsenacommacah, economics were imbued with cultural and spiritual overtones. Trade and gift-giving formed more

² Rice, "Escape from Tsenacommacah: Chesapeake Algonquians and the Powhatan Menace," 101,11.

³ Potter, "Early English Effects on Virginia Algonquian Exchange and Tribute in the Tidewater Potomac," 217; Rice, "Escape from Tsenacommacah: Chesapeake Algonquians and the Powhatan Menace," 101.

⁴ Strachey, *The Historie of Travell into Virginia Britania* (1612), 57.

⁵ Timothy Earle, *How Chiefs Come to Power* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), 12-13.

than European-style economic relationships, they helped convey spiritual and cultural authority as well.⁶

As a paramount chiefdom, Tsenacommacah depended on trade. The several districts of Tsenacommacah were held together in part by the exchange of prestige-goods that could not be produced locally or easily in what is sometimes called a prestige goods economy.⁷ Prestige goods were items that conveyed wealth through their innate qualities. That is, to demonstrate wealth and power in a prestige-goods economy, one needed to obtain and distribute goods that were particularly valuable, not simply to amass quotidian goods. Value was positively correlated with the distance (real or ascribed) the object traveled from its place of origin (again, real or ascribed) to the recipient. Thus, things from very far away were especially potent carriers of spiritual power. Prestige goods embodied and conveyed something of their origin to the possessor, whether that origin was a distant place or polity or a supernatural place or force. Simply possessing such prestige goods conveyed the power associated with these places/forces to the holder and, equally important, demonstrated the possessor's ability to obtain these goods. Whatever power created the prestige goods -- foreigners, deities, etc. -- was passed along, and to some extent controlled, by the new possessor.⁸ For a paramount chief such as Wahunsonacock, possessing prestige goods and knowing how to get them through trade and marriage were at the root of his authority. Even so, it was important for chiefs to amass more conventional commodities in the interest of good government. For example, Wahunsonacock collected tributes

⁶ Gallivan, *James River Chiefdoms : The Rise of Social Inequality in the Chesapeake*, 24; Frederic W. Gleach, *Powhatan's World and Colonial Virginia : A Conflict of Cultures*, Studies in the Anthropology of North American Indians (Lincoln, Neb.: University of Nebraska Press, 1997), 32.

⁷ Richter, "Tsenacommacah and the Atlantic World," 32.

⁸ Ibid., 33.

of corn from all his districts and expected commoners to labor in his private fields, the produce of which he stored to support priests and for affairs of state (such as feeding starving Englishmen,) but prestige goods provided the authoritative luster of the ruling class and separated them from commoners.⁹

In Tsenacommacah, political ties were established and affirmed most often by the exchange of prestige goods. The subordinate tribes within Tsenacommacah were not equal in the eyes of their mamanatowick. The local werowances competed for the favor of Wahunsonacock by making tribute offerings of “skinnes beads, copper, pearles, deare, turkies, wild beasts, and come.”¹⁰ By gifting prestige goods to his subordinate werowances in exchange for their tribute, Wahunsonacock established asymmetrical bonds of obligation that tied the paramountcy together. While reciprocity and gift-exchange were the chief methods of building political will and uniting Tsenacommacah, it would be wrong to label the Powhatan a redistributive chiefdom, as most of the redistributing happened among elites. Instead of collecting and redistributing all the goods produced within the paramountcy, Wahunsonacock redistributed prestige goods to those who had done him personal favors or given him gifts.¹¹ Wahunsonacock lacked the infrastructure to collect and oversee all prestige goods that might come into Tsenacommacah. Instead the mamanatowick relied on lesser werowances to pass prestige goods

⁹ Potter, *Commoners, Tribute, and Chiefs : The Development of Algonquian Culture in the Potomac Valley*, 170-73; Mary W. Helms, "Political Lords and Political Ideology in Southeastern Chiefdoms: Comments and Observations," in *Lords of the Southeast: Social Inequality and the Native Elites of Southeastern North America*, ed. Alex W. Barker and Timothy R. Pauketat, *Archaeological Papers of the American Anthropological Association* (Washington DC: 1992), 188; Richter, "Tsenacommacah and the Atlantic World," 32-33. Potter, "Early English Effects on Virginia Algonquian Exchange and Tribute in the Tidewater Potomac," 217.

¹⁰ Helen C. Rountree, *The Powhatan Indians of Virginia : Their Traditional Culture*, 1st ed., The Civilization of the American Indian Series (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1989), 100; Smith, "A True Relation [1608]," 69.

¹¹ Mallios, *The Deadly Politics of Giving: Exchange and Violence at Ajacan, Roanoke, and Jamestown*, 12; Helen C. Rountree and E. Randolph Turner III, "The Evolution of the Powhatan Paramount Chiefdom in Virginia," in *Chiefdoms and Chieftaincy in America*, ed. Elsa M. Redmond (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1998), 269.

up the social ladder to him in exchange for his favor.¹² By rewarding loyalty or service with copper or a string of beads, Wahunsonacock demonstrated that from him flowed benefits material, spiritual and political.¹³

Conceptions of economic and spiritual power were intrinsically linked in Tsenacommacah. Spiritual power was at the root of economic and political power. The spiritual world of the Powhatan began with the creator, Ahone, from whom all spiritual power, (*maintou* or *manit*) flowed.¹⁴ While everything in creation flowed from Ahone, he was distant and unconcerned with the affairs of humans, good or bad. Another divine being, Okeus or Oke was morally neutral and intervened directly in the lives of humans. It was Okeus who spoke to priests and whom the Powhatans sought to appease by acting according to his dictates.¹⁵ While English sources explain Okeus differently, Margaret Holmes Williamson's exploration of Powhatan religion points out that the idea of Okeus was less of a discrete divine being, as described by some English sources, and more of a personification of spiritual power generally. That is, Okeus was Manitou personified, not a particular divinity. Okeus' punishments and blessings were to be feared and courted just as spiritual power was to be feared and courted.¹⁶ While Okeus was more accessible than Ahone, *quiyoughcosughs* - a pantheon of lesser deities including werowances and priests who served as intermediaries between humans and the spiritual world - revealed spiritual power for most people. It was the *quiyoughcosughs* who interpreted the will of Okeus, and they

¹² Rountree, *The Powhatan Indians of Virginia : Their Traditional Culture*, 144-45.

¹³ Margaret Holmes Williamson, *Powhatan Lords of Life and Death: Command and Consent in Seventeenth-Century Virginia* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2003), 148-53.

¹⁴ The word Manitou shares the same root as Wahunsonacock's title, Mamanatowick. For a discussion of the idea of spiritual power and Manitou in Tsenacommacah, see *ibid.*, 176.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 175; Smith, "A Map of Virginia [1612]," 169-70; Strachey, *The Historie of Travell into Virginia Britania (1612)*, 89.

¹⁶ Williamson, *Powhatan Lords of Life and Death: Command and Consent in Seventeenth-Century Virginia*, 176; Beverly, *The History and Present State of Virginia*, 156.

who maintained order and the flow of spiritual benefits through trade and diplomacy.¹⁷ The most tangible symbols of spiritual power among the Powhatans were prestige goods, and *quiyoughcosughs* supported their temporal claims of authority by maintaining the flow and display of prestige goods.

In the early-contact period, English observers often noted the splendid array of prestige goods with which Powhatan *quiyoughcosughs* presented themselves at ceremonial occasions. William Strachey described the style and bearing of the wife of a lesser werowance in Tsenacommacah in lavish detail “layd without doors, covered with a faire white drest deare-skyn... and when she rose she had a mayde who fetch’t her a frontall of white Corrall, and pendants of great pearles...and a Chayne with long lynckes of Copper...which came twice or thrice double about her neck...thus attired with some variety of feathers, and flowers stuck in their hayres, they seeme as debonayre, quaynt, and well pleased, as a daughter of the howse of Austria behoung with all her Iewells.”¹⁸ Likewise, John Smith noted that elites wore deer-skin mantles “embroidered with white beads, some with copper...but the common sort have scarce to cover their nakednesse, but with grasse, the leaves to trees, or such like.”¹⁹ The effect of displaying prestige goods was obvious, even to European observers like Smith. Clearly, in Tsenacommacah, as in Europe, prestige goods demonstrated power and authority.

When not in use, werowances kept their prestige goods in *Quioccasans*. *Quioccasans* combined the functions of mortuary temples and storehouses. Alongside prestige goods and

¹⁷ Strachey, *The Historie of Travell into Virginia Britania* (1612), 88-89; Beverly, *The History and Present State of Virginia*, 154-57; Rice, "Escape from Tsenacommacah: Chesapeake Algonquians and the Powhatan Menace," 112-13.

¹⁸ Strachey, *The Historie of Travell into Virginia Britania* (1612), 65.

¹⁹ Smith, "The Generall Historie of Virginia, New-England, and the Summer Isles," 115.

surplus staples, they housed a statue of Okeus, and the prepared remains of dead werowances.²⁰

John Smith described one such building as “50 or 60 yards in length...At the 4 corner of this house stand 4 Images as Sentinels, one of a Dragon, another a Beare, the 3 like a Leopard, and the fourth like a giantlike man, all made evillfavorably, according to their best workmanship.”²¹

Besides projecting spiritual power, the statues and remains likely acted as insurance against theft in a society without locks.²² Only *quiyoughcosughs* were allowed to enter the *Quioccasan*, and English reports of these structures “filled with images of their Kings and Divels and Tombes of their Predecessors” suggest that even for English Protestants, the places seemed to hold special power.²³ While the temples were located throughout Tsenacommacah, Wahunsonacock’s home district of Pamunkey housed the largest and holiest of the *Quioccasans*.

Among the Powhatan, only *quiyoughcosughs* expected an afterlife and they were buried in the *Quioccasan* with the prestige goods they had accumulated in life.²⁴ The bodies of elites were left outside on scaffolds until they were only bones, then the bones were gathered, scraped of any remaining flesh, draped with beads and copper and re-interred along with any accumulated prestige goods in the *Quioccasan*.²⁵ For commoners in the Algonquin Chesapeake, death usually meant either burial in a shallow, stake-lined grave, or a modified two-stage burial

²⁰ Henry Spelman, "Relation of Virgina, 1609," in *Jamestown Narratives: Eyewitness Accounts of the Virginia Colony*, ed. Edward Wright Haile (Champlain RoundHouse, 1998), 486.

²¹ Smith, "A Map of Virginia [1612]," 173-74.

²² Beverly, *The History and Present State of Virginia*, 154-57; Williamson, *Powhatan Lords of Life and Death: Command and Consent in Seventeenth-Century Virginia*, 180-85.

²³ William Strachey in 1612 and Robert Beverly in 1705 describe the *Quioccasan* similarly and Beverly notes being “at first scrupulous to enter this obscure place.” It is worth noting that Beverly’s scruples did not prevent him from tearing open the embalmed remains of the chiefs he found there to see what they were buried with. Beverly, *The History and Present State of Virginia*, 155. John Smith, "A Map of Virginia," in *The Complete Works of Captain John Smith: 1580-1631*, ed. Philip L. Barbour (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1986 [1612]), 169-70.

²⁴ "A Map of Virginia," 169.

²⁵ Rountree, *The Powhatan Indians of Virginia : Their Traditional Culture*, 113, 38-39.

like that of the elites that ended in mass burial in an ossuary, or low burial mound, not placement within the temple/storagehouse.²⁶ Daniel Richter points out that the death of a werowance or the loss of their accumulated wealth contributed to the instability of paramount chiefdoms because new werowances had to re-establish sources of prestige goods and the power that came with them instead of inheriting the wealth of their predecessors with each new generation.²⁷ While Richter is correct that one werowance did not pass down his belongings to his successor, there were methods for maintaining stability in succession. For example, when a werowance died, his or her family hosted a public feast and distributed beads to the common people who fought “scrambled” for them with such enthusiasm that some “break their arms and legs, being pressed by the company.”²⁸ Re-distributing beads likely helped lessen the sting of losing the dead werowance’s wealth and connections and helped ease the transition to a new werowance. Moreover, by burying elites with some of their prestige goods, the rarity and price of prestige goods like copper stayed high for those who had it. As this chapter will show, once a prestige good became common, it lost its prestige and the ability to convey authority.

Copper and Beads

Before the English arrived in Tsenacommacah, copper was the most important and highly prized prestige good. Copper fulfilled all the requirements for a prestige good: it was rare, imported, and its physical characteristics (redness, reflectivity) marked it as a conductor of spiritual power. Before the arrival of Europeans, native trade routes imported copper. Copper

²⁶ Dennis C. Curry, *Feast of the Dead: Aboriginal Ossuaries in Maryland* (Crownsville, Maryland: The Archaeological Society of Maryland, Inc. and The Maryland Historical Trust Press, 1999), 5-7.

²⁷ Richter, "Tsenacommacah and the Atlantic World," 36.

²⁸ Spelman, "Relation of Virginia, 1609," 491; Rountree, *The Powhatan Indians of Virginia : Their Traditional Culture*, 111.

probably came from the Great Lakes region, though there are copper deposits in western Virginia and southwest of the Powhatans near the town of Virgilina, Virginia that likely supplemented the available supply.²⁹ Copper was attractive because it was malleable and could be creatively shaped into tubes, beads, earrings, and bells.³⁰ Powhatan artisans cold-hammered sheets of copper and cut them into gorgets and medallions traded and worn by high-status people. Copper was also used as payment when werowances wanted to reward warriors and other elites because it conveyed the power and authority they needed to succeed at war and to be leaders at home.³¹ Copper's spiritual power came not just from its rarity and association with far-away places but also from its color and texture. Both the redness and reflectivity of hammered copper had deep significance. Chesapeake Algonquians associated copper's reflective quality with the spirit world. Moreover, the color red, associated with blood, was an important and powerful color in

²⁹ *The Powhatan Indians of Virginia: Their Traditional Culture*, 53; "The Powhatans and Other Woodland Indians as Travelers," 45; Potter, "Early English Effects on Virginia Algonquian Exchange and Tribute in the Tidewater Potomac," 218.

³⁰ Rountree, *The Powhatan Indians of Virginia : Their Traditional Culture*, 71.

³¹ Strachey, *The Historie of Travell into Virginia Britania (1612)*, 68-69; Rice, "Escape from Tsenacommacah: Chesapeake Algonquians and the Powhatan Menace," 116.

Algonquian society.³²



Examples of copper found at Jamestown ca. 1607-1610. Note the curling scraps left over from cutting sheet copper into desirable shapes such as the diamond in the center and tubes at the bottom right. Image courtesy of the Association for the Preservation of Virginia Antiquities.

Second to copper in importance were beads, particularly white beads made from shells. Stranded marine shell beads—called, Sewant (Dutch), porcelaine (French), or wampumpeague (English)—served as what anthropologist George Hamell calls the “diamonds of the country” before Europeans arrived.³³ In the Chesapeake, indigenous artisans used specialized tools and training to produce two types of beads from marine shells, Peake and Roanoke. Jerome Hawley,

³² Gleach, *Powhatan's World and Colonial Virginia: A Conflict of Cultures*, 57.

³³ Hamell, "The Iroquois and the World's Rim: Speculations on Color, Culture, and Contact," 455-56.

a Catholic merchant in Virginia in the 1630s, described the difference between Peake and Roanoke, “both of them are made of a fish-shell, that they gather by the Sea side. Wompompeag [Peake] is of the greater sort, and Roanoke of the lesser, and the Wompompeag is three times the value of Roanoke; and these serve as Gold and Silver doe here.”³⁴ Archaeologists have identified four distinct types of shell-beads in use in the seventeenth-century Chesapeake, though they agree with Hawley that the most valuable was wampum-peake, a purple bead made from the small, dark section of clam shells.³⁵

Archaeological investigations reveal that by the sixteenth century, the Chesapeake region exported locally produced shell beads and imported copper objects from beyond the Chesapeake.³⁶ In the protohistoric period, large-scale indigenous trade networks seem to have been less traveled than during the woodland period, but copper continued to flow from the Great Lakes area, and shell beads from the Middle Atlantic coast continued to flow back.³⁷ Marine shell from the Chesapeake traveled up the Susquehanna River into central New York. Once Europeans arrived, their trade goods also flowed along this trade route. Hamell suggests that the increased presence of shell beads in burials by inland peoples like the Seneca during the sixteenth century reflect not a religious change, but a reaction to increased shell flowing inland from the coast. Shell flowed inland because coastal groups were acting as middlemen, trading

³⁴ Jerome Hawley, "A Relation of Maryland, 1635," in *Narratives of Early Maryland: 1633-1684*, ed. C.C. Hall (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1910), 90.

³⁵ Rountree, *The Powhatan Indians of Virginia : Their Traditional Culture*, 71-75.

³⁶ Martin D. Gallivan, "The Archaeology of Native Societies in the Chesapeake: New Investigations and Interpretations," *Journal Of Archaeological Research* 19, no. 3 (2011): 285.

³⁷ Hamell, "The Iroquois and the World's Rim: Speculations on Color, Culture, and Contact," 458.

their shells and shell beads with inland groups for furs and exchanging those furs for European-made goods that they kept for themselves.³⁸

Besides beads, shells were traded in their natural form as containers. Particularly large shells might be carved into gorgets and worn around the neck. To carve a gorget, a craftsman required a rather large shell. In the Chesapeake, whelks are the largest shells around and several varieties live in the waters off Tsenacommacah. Beads might be made of saltwater species such as whelk and cockles or of hard clams found in the lower, brackish reaches of rivers and estuaries. Most of the beads in the Chesapeake came from the eastern shore.³⁹ John Smith reported that "Cuscarawaoke" (Nanticokes), on the Eastern Shore, produced the most shell beads in the Chesapeake region and that they, "caused as much dissention among the Salvages, as gold and silver amongst Christians."⁴⁰ Shells and shell-beads were similar to copper in that they could not be easily acquired within the core area of Tsenacommacah. While beads were clearly traded with the people of the lower Delmarva Peninsula, it is not clear how the political/economic relationship between the Powhatans and the people of the Eastern Shore worked.

Wahunsonacock told Smith the people over the Bay owed him tribute and explained "how hee sent them over the Baye, for tribute Beads, and also what Countries paide him Beads, Copper or Skins."⁴¹ While he may have claimed them as tributaries, it seems unlikely that the Eastern Shore peoples could have been effectively coerced into paying tribute from so far away as

³⁸ Ibid., 458-59.

³⁹ Davidson, "Relations between the Powhatans and the Eastern Shore; Rountree, "The Powhatans and Other Woodland Indians as Travelers," 48.

⁴⁰ Smith, "The Generall Historie of Virginia, New-England, and the Summer Isles," 168; Clark and Rountree, "The Powhatans and the Maryland Mainland," 131-32.

⁴¹ Smith, "A True Relation [1608]," 69; Davidson, "Relations between the Powhatans and the Eastern Shore," 144-45.

Tsenacommacah. Because beads were available from a wider variety of sources than copper, they were a less easily controllable commodity for Wahunsonacock. Still, their importance in Tsenacommacah meant that the impulse to control the bead trade was strong. Historian Thomas Davidson argues that when the paramount chief sent his canoes over the bay for tribute, it was because he wanted to acquire beads for use in statecraft, not because the people there owed him tribute.⁴² The line between tribute and exchange is often blurry in chiefdom-level societies. Even if Wahunsonacock overstated his power in Delmarva, there is substantial archaeological evidence that the beads produced there were important in the prestige-goods economy of Tsenacommacah.

Copper and beads played an important role in the internal politics of Tsenacommacah. One of the only examples of Powhatan's redistributive, paramount chiefdom in action is an account of his doling out strings of beads to his people after they had finished planting his personal corn fields. Ceremonially walking the perimeter of his freshly planted fields, Wahunsonacock strode forward while the planters walked backwards with their faces towards the mamanatowick. The paramount chief placed stranded beads directly in the hands of favored subjects while ordinary laborers had to scramble for the loose handfuls of beads he "flung" into the crowd.⁴³ While this kind of prestige goods distribution had an obvious reciprocal, economic and political function, Margaret Holmes Williamson sees Wahunsonacock's bead flinging as part of a larger fertility ritual wherein the distribution of white beads around a newly planted field may represent semen and fertility. Williamson argues that by distributing beads to the planters,

⁴² "Relations between the Powhatans and the Eastern Shore," 146.

⁴³ Spelman, "Relation of Virginia, 1609," 493; Richter, "Tsenacommacah and the Atlantic World," 58-59; Rountree, *The Powhatan Indians of Virginia: Their Traditional Culture*, 110.

the mamanatowick not only condescended to grant reciprocal gifts as a kind of payment, but he ritualistically ensured the fertility of his field and his people.⁴⁴ Powhatan marriage ceremonies also featured flying beads. During the ceremony described by Henry Spelman, the father of the groom produced a long strand of white, shell beads which he brought down on the couple's clasped hands with enough force to break the strand and send beads flying.⁴⁵

At one level, the fertility symbolism of flying white beads at both weddings and agricultural occasions seems obvious, but the color white meant more for the Powhatans than simply fertility. White symbolized the social, the living and the impermanent.⁴⁶ Williamson points out that in the manhood-ritual known as the *huskinaw*, young men began the ceremony painted white to represent religious ignorance but left painted black to represent religious revelation and permanence.⁴⁷ White symbolized civil authority in clothing and gifts as well. When Wahunsonacock distributed white pearls, and when they were used at a wedding, they were meant to reaffirm civil ties and subordination by the receiver – tying the paramountcy together.

A well-known indication of the importance of shell beads as prestige goods in the spiritual/political realm of Tsenacommacah is their use in decorating one of the most impressive surviving pieces of seventeenth-century Powhatan artwork, "Powhatan's Mantle."⁴⁸ The mantle

⁴⁴ Williamson, *Powhatan Lords of Life and Death: Command and Consent in Seventeenth-Century Virginia*, 157-58.

⁴⁵ Spelman, "Relation of Virginia, 1609," 488.

⁴⁶ Camilla Townsend, *Pocahontas and the Powhatan Dilemma* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2004), 86-87; Williamson, *Powhatan Lords of Life and Death: Command and Consent in Seventeenth-Century Virginia*, 253.

⁴⁷ *Powhatan Lords of Life and Death: Command and Consent in Seventeenth-Century Virginia*, 250.

⁴⁸ Michael J. Klein and Douglas W. Sanford, "Analytical Scale and Archaeological Perspectives on the Contact Era in the Northern Neck of Virginia," in *Indian and European Contact in Context: The Mid-Atlantic Region*, ed. Dennis B. Blanton and Julia A. King (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2004), 59; Rountree, *The Powhatan Indians of Virginia: Their Traditional Culture*, 103-05.

is composed of four deer hides sewn together into a rectangle and decorated with beadwork that portrays a central human figure flanked by two animals of different, though indeterminate, species. Around the human and animal figures are thirty-four round discs of shells. While it is perhaps the most well-known artifact from Tsenacommacah, Powhatan's Mantle is probably not a mantle, nor was it necessarily Wahunsonacock's. Ethnohistorian Christian Feest points out that Wahunsonacock would be unique among Eastern Algonquian peoples if he wore the piece on his shoulders in European fashion. The vaguely cape-like form of the piece, with a gap along the center seam at the top, is likely because it was sewn together from four deer skins, not because it was meant to be worn.⁴⁹ It is also worth noting that the piece was not a gift from Wahunsonacock; the English looted it from one of the *quioccasans* used by the werowances of Tsenacommacah to store their prestige goods and the bones of their leaders.⁵⁰ Despite being almost certainly over-attributed, the mantle did originate within Tsenacommacah and does demonstrate the importance of beads and prestige goods more generally within the paramountcy.

⁴⁹ Christian F. Feest, "Powhatan's Mantle and Skin Pouch [the "Virginia Purse"]," in *Tradescant's Rarities: Essays on the Foundation of Theashmolean Museum*, ed. Arthur MacGregor (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983), 134.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 134-35.



“Powhatan’s Mantle” image courtesy of the Ashmolean Museum, University of Oxford.

The most spiritually powerful trade goods in Tsenacommacah came from outside, both physically and metaphysically. Copper came from the Great Lakes and beads from the Eastern Shore. Before the arrival of permanent European settlements, both beads and copper stayed largely in the hands of *quiyoughcosughs* and bolstered their authority.⁵¹ Werowances administered long-distance trade and tried to keep a monopoly on such powerful goods.⁵² English copper and glass beads were somewhat different from their indigenous counterparts,

⁵¹ Rice, "Escape from Tsenacommacah: Chesapeake Algonquians and the Powhatan Menace," 115-16.

⁵² Strachey, *The Historie of Travell into Virginia Britania* (1612), 56-57.

but not in a fundamental way. They looked a little different, flowed across a different exchange network, and they were available in great quantities quickly, but they were incorporated into the indigenous system easily.⁵³ As the last chapter argued, Wahunsonacock was well aware of the dangers that came with Europeans by the time the English arrived in 1607. The only reason for Wahunsonacock to risk bringing the English into the fold of Tsenacommacah is covetousness of English trade goods, a fact not lost on the English who noted that the Indians were “covetous of our commodities...and demand after copper, white beades, hatchets... knyves and such like.”⁵⁴ Indeed, the expectation of Powhatan covetousness was at the core of early English plans for colonization. Christopher Newport had faith that once the Indians saw English trade goods, they would become willing partners in a trade that would be mutually beneficial.⁵⁵ To some extent, the optimistic English were correct. At first, the werowances were able to control the trade in English goods, much like they controlled the indigenous prestige goods-trade.⁵⁶ Even English goods that non-elites acquired found their way up the social ladder to Wahunsonacock because he had the power to convert such goods into social status. Because of the prestige-goods economy in Tsenacommacah, even goods that were stolen from the English percolated up the social ladder through werowances, sometimes to be re-gifted to the original English owners.⁵⁷

⁵³ Hamell, "Trading in Metaphors: The Magic of Beads, Another Perspective Upon Indian-European Contact in Northeastern North America," 18.

⁵⁴ Strachey, *The Historie of Travell into Virginia Britania* (1612), 115.

⁵⁵ Martin H. Quitt, "Trade and Acculturation at Jamestown, 1607-1609: The Limits of Understanding," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 52, no. 2 (Apr., 1995): 229; Timothy Silver, *A New Face on the Countryside : Indians, Colonists, and Slaves in South Atlantic Forests, 1500-1800*, Studies in Environment and History (Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 69.

⁵⁶ Potter, "Early English Effects on Virginia Algonquian Exchange and Tribute in the Tidewater Potomac," 215. *ibid.*, 219; Rice, "Escape from Tsenacommacah: Chesapeake Algonquians and the Powhatan Menace," 116.

⁵⁷ Potter, "Early English Effects on Virginia Algonquian Exchange and Tribute in the Tidewater Potomac," 220-21; Smith, "A True Relation [1608]," 32-33.

Within a few years of permanent English settlement, however, the prestige-goods economy began to break down.

English Impact on the Prestige-Goods Economy of Tsenacommacah

At first, the English colonists at Jamestown must have seemed like ideal trading partners to Wahunsonacock; they were weak, small in number and had wondrous prestige goods they were willing to trade. In 1607, the Powhatans tried to incorporate the English as a subordinate district of Tsenacommacah. John Smith reported that Wahunsonacock conducted a ceremony designed to incorporate himself and Jamestown as a werowance and district of Tsenacommacah. Incorporation was not a simple matter and newly conquered or newly cajoled members of the paramountcy were sometimes relocated from their home districts to destabilize their old lives and assert their dependence on Wahunsonacock as a source of power and prestige goods.⁵⁸ In the case of the Kecoughtans, whom the Powhatans conquered circa 1596, the people were moved closer to the heart of Tsenacommacah, while loyalist Powhatans re-settled their original territory. As he had done with the Kecoughtans only a few years before, the paramount chief tried to get the English to relocate closer to the core of his realm where they would be easier to monitor and control. Wahunsonacock offered Smith the "Country of Capahowasick" where Wahunsonacock would "for ever esteeme [Smith] as his sonne Nantaquoud," and the English would continue to produce prestige goods as tribute.⁵⁹ Smith pretended to accept the offer, but it was clear by 1609

⁵⁸ Rountree, *The Powhatan Indians of Virginia : Their Traditional Culture*, 118-19.

⁵⁹ Smith, "The Generall Historie of Virginia, New-England, and the Summer Isles," 151; Rice, "Escape from Tsenacommacah: Chesapeake Algonquians and the Powhatan Menace," 120.

that Smith was a faithless werowance and the Powhatan leader's approach to the English changed as he began to deal with them as useful foreigners, not a dependent chiefdom.

Martin Quitt and Seth Mallios have written extensively on the history of the early-contact Chesapeake with a focus on understanding how the politics of a gift-exchange economy impacted Anglo-Powhatan relations. By looking closely at European records, both authors find evidence that the seemingly sporadic violence of the early-contact period resulted from English violations of the gift-exchange economy extant in Tsenacommacah.⁶⁰ By tracing specific European violations of the gift-economy, a declensionist picture of Powhatan-Anglo relations emerges. April-September 1607 was characterized by unbalanced hospitality and gift giving on the part of the Powhatans. By September 1607- March 1608, unbalanced gift giving and barter marked English-Powhatan exchanges as the Powhatan began to realize the English could not be counted on to engage with the gift-exchange economy properly. From March-September 1608, the Powhatans engaged a trade embargo in retaliation for English demands and violations of the gift-exchange economy. By September 1608-January 1609, John Smith re-engaged the Powhatans through forcing them to trade corn for copper and other trade goods, sparking widespread violence.⁶¹ Similarly, Allison Games argues that Virginia failed as a trading post colony because the English failed to act like trading partners.⁶² Instead of acting like traders, they vacillated between obsequiousness and caution and bullying soldiers. John Smith tried to instill fear and avoid warfare, but "neither goal suited the imperatives of a long-term trade

⁶⁰ Mallios, *The Deadly Politics of Giving: Exchange and Violence at Ajacan, Roanoke, and Jamestown*, 24, 118-22; Quitt, "Trade and Acculturation at Jamestown, 1607-1609: The Limits of Understanding," 258.

⁶¹ "Trade and Acculturation at Jamestown, 1607-1609: The Limits of Understanding," 244; Mallios, *The Deadly Politics of Giving: Exchange and Violence at Ajacan, Roanoke, and Jamestown*.

⁶² Games, *The Web of Empire*, 134.

relationship.”⁶³ The Powhatans produced no marketable goods, so the model of the colony changed from one of a trading station to a settlement producing commodities as in Hakluyt’s imperial vision.⁶⁴ After this shift in policy, English success relied upon draconian discipline and forced Indian trade for corn, which turned relations with Indians violent.

While the next chapter will deal more extensively with the causes of the First Anglo-Powhatan War, it is important to note here that Quitt and Mallios point out correctly that the chief reason the two sides resorted to war was not because of a cultural misunderstandings or poor communication, but because they each came to understand precisely what the other side wanted and realized they could not accommodate each other. As Frederick Fausz notes, by 1609 both the Powhatans and the English realized that “members of the other culture were neither as ignorant nor as inferior as previously believed.”⁶⁵

Subtle English attempts to claim dominion over Tsenacommacah did not go unnoticed by Wahusonacock. In 1607, soon after arriving in Tsenacommacah, an English expeditionary party exploring up the James River stopped at the fall line (because their indigenous guide refused to go any farther) and planted a cross inscribed with “Jacobus Rex. 1607.” Gabriel Archer reported that the Powhatan guides were suspicious of what exactly planting a cross meant until they were assured it was a symbol of the two nations, English and Powhatan, coming together in firm friendship.⁶⁶ While the incident with the cross was deftly parlayed into a proclamation of friendship, in 1608 Christopher Newport attempted to perform a coronation of Wahusonacock,

⁶³ Ibid., 136.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 137.

⁶⁵ Fausz, "Patterns of Anglo-Indian Aggression and Accommodation Along the Mid-Atlantic Coast, 1584-1634," 237.

⁶⁶ Archer, "Relatyon of the Discovery of Our River," 109.

investing him as a subject of King James, a ceremony that the mamanatowick understood and rejected. Smith's description of the coronation ceremony reveals how well the Powhatan leader understood English ambitions for his territory as early as 1608: "A fowle trouble there was to make [Wahunsonacock] kneele to receave his crowne, he neither knowing the majestie, nor meaning of a Crowne, nor bending of the knee, indured so many perswasions, examples, and instructions, as tired them all. At last by leaning hard on his shoulders, he a little stooped, and Newport put the Crowne on his head."⁶⁷ While Smith writes that Wahunsonacock did not understand the meaning of a crown, his description of the paramount chief's actions reveal that he knew exactly what the crown Newport offered meant and chose to reject it.

While Martin Quitt and Seth Mallios are correct that Powhatan awareness of English goals bred mistrust, the political situation in Tsenacommacah kept Wahunsonacock engaged with the English anyway. Tsenacommacah was a land situated within a native ground and on the fringe of a burgeoning Atlantic world. As such, it was a place where indigenous responses to English interlopers were determined by more than what the English did, but by how they were situated within a larger native ground and Atlantic world. The Powhatans realized by 1609 that they would be unable to engage with the English in the way they had hoped, but after this realization, they did not stop trying. While Mallios and Quitt are correct that English violation of trade and cultural norms led the Powhatan leader to reject the English as trusted allies, they go too far when they suggest that Wahunsonacock engaged in a trade embargo in an effort to starve out the English. From a myopically English perspective, Wahunsonacock's actions look like a wholesale rejection of the English. However, international relations are rarely so simple that a

⁶⁷ Smith, "The Proceedings of the English Colonie in Virginia, [1606-1612]," 237.

nation can simply trade with its friends and spurn its enemies. Tsenacommacah was not such a simple place and Wahunsonacock was not such a simple man. While it is often asserted that the Powhatans could have abandoned the English to starve at any time in the early-contact period of 1607-1609, this assertion ignores the political situation in Tsenacommacah at the time. Powhatan abandonment would not have meant the death of the English. The English were eager to form trade relationships with werowances on the ethnic fringe of Tsenacommacah and even farther away, many of whom might threaten Tsenacommacah if they had a European military alliance and a steady source of trade goods. Abandonment then, would have only have emboldened Wahunsonacock's indigenous rivals. As the next chapter points out in detail, Wahunsonacock's efforts to force the English to behave as exclusive trading partners with Tsenacommacah sparked much of the violence of early contact period, not his efforts to expel them from the Chesapeake.

Martin Quitt calls the Powhatan threats to stop trade with the English "the first commercial boycotts in American history."⁶⁸ While the abandonment might have been a boycott, the Powhatan were not prepared to abandon trade with the English altogether. The Powhatan leader could not risk the English engaging with one of his rivals. This was Wahunsonacock's dilemma; he needed to show strength and reject the English, but he could not risk driving them to his enemies. As the next chapter will demonstrate, the sporadic Powhatan-English violence of the early contact period was not only due to English failures to act appropriately, but also because the Powhatans were trying to use violence to keep the English controllable and within the hegemony of Tsenacommacah. From 1609 to 1614, the Powhatans vacillated between overtures of friendship to deadly raids and from boycotts to liberal trade with

⁶⁸ Quitt, "Trade and Acculturation at Jamestown, 1607-1609: The Limits of Understanding," 230.

the English. The English thought these changes were typical of the “inconstancy” of the Powhatans. However, Tsenacommacah’s changing policies were part of a strategy designed to monopolize the English trade and to prevent the English from cultivating rival indigenous trading partners.

The English were aware that Wahunsonacock had local enemies that they might court. At the same time the English arrived, the mamanatowick was trying to develop a distinctive Powhatan ethnic identity for his people.⁶⁹ Some scholars point out that outside of ceremonial occasion commoners were not easily distinguished from elites in Tsenacommacah. That Wahunsonacock often condescended to dressing and acting like a commoner may have been part of a deliberate plan to move beyond elite versus commoner divisions and bring the Powhatans together as a common group defined against “foreigners.”⁷⁰ In an attempt to break up this unification, the Virginia Company instructed the Governor in 1609 to make allies with distant groups who were “enemy” to Powhatan and proceeded to list all those groups in every cardinal direction who were potential allies and enemies of Tsenacommacah. Inspired by the Spanish conquistador’s model in Mexico, the Company did not think it would be hard to find allies. In fact, their directions for finding allies to the north read simply, “he [Wahunsonacock] hath no freinde to the North.”⁷¹ William Strachey agreed that the Wahunsonacock’s recently-annexed districts “maie peradventure be drawne from him for some rown Rewardes and a Plentiful

⁶⁹ Rountree and III, “The Evolution of the Powhatan Paramount Chiefdom in Virginia,” 285-86.

⁷⁰ Scarry and Maxham, “Elite Actors in the Protohistoric: Elite Identities and Interaction with Europeans in the Apalachee and Powhatan Chiefdoms,” 160.

⁷¹ Virginia Company of London, “Instrucons Orders and Constitucons to Sr Thomas Gates Knight Governor of Virginia: May, 1609,” in *The Records of the Virginia Company of London*, ed. Susan Myra Kingsbury (Washington DC: United States Government Printing Office, 1933 [1609]), 19.

promise of copper.”⁷² The Virginia Company’s advice was sound. By 1613, the English had established good trading relationships with the nominally Powhatan chiefdoms of the Patawomecks on the South Bank of the James River and the Accomacks on the Eastern Shore.⁷³

As James Rice points out, the English did not have to go far, even people close to home chafed under the rule of Wahunsonacock.⁷⁴ The Quiyoughcohannocks, a group that lived along the James River and were not among the recently annexed cultural fringe, seemed eager to form a trade/diplomatic relationship with the English. Because of a personal slight, Wahunsonacock deposed the Quiyoughcohannock’s werowance, Pepiscunimah, and gave him control of a smaller, less important town “with some few people about him.”⁷⁵ (Strachey says the schism happened because Pepiscunimah ran off with a particularly beautiful wife of Wahunsonacock’s brother.)⁷⁶ Between 1609 and 1614, when the Powhatan paramount chief attempted to bring the English into line through sporadic attacks and trade boycotts, the Quiyoughcohannocks continued sporadic trade with the English and made it clear that they were interested in a good relationship with the newcomers by providing food and presents despite Wahunsonacock’s admonishments to abandon them. The Quiyoughcohannocks even provided a guide to help the English search for the lost colonists of Roanoke.⁷⁷

The English did not fail to notice the importance of copper in Tsenacommacah. Scraps clipped from sheets of European copper litter the Jamestown archaeological site where English

⁷² Strachey, *The Historie of Travell into Virginia Britania* (1612), 108.

⁷³ Fausz, "Patterns of Anglo-Indian Aggression and Accommodation Along the Mid-Atlantic Coast, 1584-1634," 241.

⁷⁴ Rice, "Escape from Tsenacommacah: Chesapeake Algonquians and the Powhatan Menace," 101.

⁷⁵ Strachey, *The Historie of Travell into Virginia Britania* (1612), 64-65.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 65.

⁷⁷ Smith, "The Proceedings of the English Colonie in Virginia, [1606-1612]," 265-66; Rice, "Escape from Tsenacommacah: Chesapeake Algonquians and the Powhatan Menace," 123-24.

colonists shaped their copper into appealing shapes for trade, often circles and squares to be worn as gorgets.⁷⁸ Archaeologists debate whether the English brought copper with them with the Indian trade in mind or if it had some other purpose. Archaeologist Carter Hudgins argues the amount and type of copper found in Early Virginia suggests it was imported as part of an industrial scheme to make bronze by taking advantage of supposed zinc deposits in Virginia.⁷⁹ Even so, there is evidence that the English knew the value of copper and came with trade in mind. Recall that Menatonon told Ralph Lane about Wahunsonacock's desire for copper in 1586. The English studied Powhatan exchange networks closely hoping that they might be able to replace the paramount chief and reap the benefits of his trade system much as the Spanish had in Mexico and Peru.⁸⁰ Only months after arriving in Tsenacommacah, John Smith noted that the Powhatans were "covetous of copper, beads, and such like."⁸¹ Whether the English recognized the value of copper before their arrival or not, they seized on almost immediately after they arrived.

English leaders suspected, correctly, that Wahunsonacock monopolized all the copper they brought into the region and doling it out in small quantities to keep its value high. William Strachey reported that Powhatan monopolized all the copper that the English introduced into the native trade system in an attempt to keep inflation down when he redistributed it, as well as to keep knowledge of the English as a font of copper from neighboring enemy tribes. Strachey wrote, "Powhatan does again vent some smale quantity [of copper] to his neighbor Nations for

⁷⁸ William Kelso, *Jamestown: The Buried Truth* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2006), 178, 81.

⁷⁹ Carter C. Hudgins, "Articles of Exchange or Ingredients of New World Metallurgy?," *Early American Studies: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 3, no. 1 (2005): 34.

⁸⁰ Hatfield, *Atlantic Virginia: Intercolonial Relations in the Seventeenth Century*, 16.

⁸¹ Smith, "A True Relation [1608]," 35; "A Map of Virginia [1612]," 168.

100 tymes the values, reserving notwithstanding for himselef a plentiful quantity.”⁸²

Archaeologist Steven Potter uses burial evidence to confirm Strachey’s assertion that werowances controlled the English copper trade at first, though he points out that elite control of the trade quickly evaporated, decreasing both the spiritual power of copper and the authority of the werowances.⁸³ As the spiritual significance of copper declined, items that had at first been useful for their intrinsic power became useful for their practical application. For example, copper kettles were cut up into decorative pieces to be worn in the early-contact period, but later came to be used as they were intended.⁸⁴ By 1610, the English were trading copper directly with commoners, which so thoroughly glutted the market that it lost its value as a prestige good.⁸⁵

As the English presence in Tsenacommacah solidified, Wahunsonacock’s new source of prestige goods became more problematic. Subordinate werowances within Tsenacommacah, particularly those on the fringes of the realm, were trading with the English and destabilizing the economic/spiritual/political ties that bound Tsenacommacah together.⁸⁶ Because they no longer had to come to Wahunsonacock for copper and other prestige goods, they were emboldened in their movements for independence. Surreptitious trade arrangements undermined the organizational efficacy of the redistributive paramountcy. As James Rice points out, several of the more recently annexed chiefdoms of Tsenacommacah were eager to ally with the English in an effort to break from Wahunsonacock’s rule.⁸⁷ Indeed, it is important to remember that many

⁸² Strachey, *The Historie of Travell into Virginia Britania* (1612), 106-07.

⁸³ Potter, "Early English Effects on Virginia Algonquian Exchange and Tribute in the Tidewater Potomac," 228-32.

⁸⁴ Rountree, "The Powhatans and the English: A Case of Multiple Conflicting Agendas," 178.

⁸⁵ Potter, "Early English Effects on Virginia Algonquian Exchange and Tribute in the Tidewater Potomac," 231.

⁸⁶ Scarry and Maxham, "Elite Actors in the Protohistoric: Elite Identities and Interaction with Europeans in the Apalachee and Powhatan Chiefdoms," 162; Rountree, "The Powhatans and the English: A Case of Multiple Conflicting Agendas," 179.

⁸⁷ Rice, "Escape from Tsenacommacah: Chesapeake Algonquians and the Powhatan Menace," 119.

of the large-scale, protohistorical indigenous nations contained groups that chafed against the centralization of power practiced by their superiors.⁸⁸ Unfortunately for Wahunsonacock, the English were becoming something of a foreign enclave, too dangerous to deal with and too dangerous to risk losing.

Lessons from the Bead Trade

While English copper glutted the native market and presented economic and political problems for Powhatan's paramountcy, English attempts at trading European-made glass beads seem to have had little impact on the Chesapeake. The archaeological record reveals that beads were relatively unimportant trade goods in the seventeenth-century Chesapeake and show up rarely when compared with the large numbers of European beads found in New England and among other Algonquin peoples on the East coast.⁸⁹ A recent compilation of twelve archaeological excavations of ossuary sites in Maryland deposited between about 1500-1700 found that only two contained significant amounts of European beads. Moreover, the two ossuaries that contained glass beads were not the most recent to be interred, as one might expect, but date from 1600-1650.⁹⁰ The dearth of European beads in the early-contact Chesapeake reveals more than an indigenous preference for copper. Bead-consumption patterns in Tsenacommacah also demonstrate how Wahunsonacock viewed the English and their role within his paramountcy.

⁸⁸ Cameron B. Wesson, "Prestige Goods, Symbolic Capital, and Social Power in the Protohistoric Southeast," in *Between Contacts and Colonies: Archaeological Perspectives on the Protohistoric Southeast*, ed. Cameron B. Wesson and Mark A. Rees (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2002), 111.

⁸⁹ Henry M. Miller, Dennis J. Pogue, and Michael A. Smolek, "Beads from the Seventeenth Century Chesapeake," in *Proceedings of the 1982 Glass Trade Bead Conference*, ed. Charles F. Hayes (Rochester, NY: Rochester Museum and Science Center, 1982), 128.

⁹⁰ Curry, *Feast of the Dead: Aboriginal Ossuaries in Maryland*, 10-11, 72-73.

John Smith reported wowing Powhatan with a handful of blue glass beads that he swapped for a boat load (200-300 bushels) of corn soon after arriving in Virginia in 1607.⁹¹ This incident alone is often used to demonstrate that Powhatan traded poorly and was overly fond of English trade goods. If that initial exchange of blue beads for corn is placed in context, however, the situation becomes more complex. As Martin Quitt points out, Wahunsonacock existed within a gift-exchange economy, and his un-equal gift of boatloads of corn for some blue beads likely had more to do with his attempting to overawe the English with his magnanimous largess than with being fooled into believing that blue beads were as valuable as Smith suggested.⁹²

Two years after Smith's blue-bead triumph, Samuel Argyll traded with the king of Patawomeck and received "nearly 400 bushels of food in exchange for 9 lbs of copper, 4 bunches of beads, and 8 doz hatchets, 5 doz knives, 4 bunches of bells, 1 dozen of sizers, and not much more worth than 40s."⁹³ Only fourteen years later, another Englishman, Robert Poole, fared far worse trading with the Patawomekes, another tidewater group. Poole exchanged "thirteen arms lengths" of stringed beads for only one "tubb" of corn. In another exchange, Poole swapped 20,000 blue beads for some woven mats needed to seal his ship against the water.⁹⁴ Even allowing for inflation due to greater availability of beads, increased inter-ethnic violence, and drought, by 1624 the price of European beads had clearly fallen so low that they no longer served as effective prestige goods. When Maryland's backers sent goods for the Indian trade in

⁹¹ Smith, "The Proceedings of the English Colonie in Virginia, [1606-1612]," 217.

⁹² Quitt, "Trade and Acculturation at Jamestown, 1607-1609: The Limits of Understanding," 246.

⁹³ Strachey, *The Historie of Travell into Virginia Britania* (1612), 46.

⁹⁴ Council Virginia et al., *Minutes of the Council and General Court of Colonial Virginia, 1622-1632, 1670-1676, with Notes and Excerpts from Original Council and General Court Records, into 1683, Now Lost* (Richmond, Va: [The Colonial press, Everett Waddey co.], 1977), 29-30; Miller, Pogue, and Smolek, "Beads from the Seventeenth Century Chesapeake," 127; Fausz, "The Powhatan Uprising of 1622 : A Historical Study of Ethnocentrism and Cultural Conflict," 479.

1634 they included 660 combs, 1100 yards of cloth, 600 axes, 5400 Sheffield knives, 480 hawks bells, and 300 brass kettles, but only 1800 individual glass beads.⁹⁵ Beads do not take up much room and were not expensive to produce, but they still made up a disproportionately tiny fraction of Maryland's 1634 trade supply, suggesting they simply were not in demand.

While interest in European-made beads fell off precipitously after John Smith's initial trade, indigenous interest in indigenous-made beads remained high, and even increased. During a 1609 trade mission for otter skins to a group south of the Meherrins, three Powhatans were killed for the Roanoke beads they brought to exchange, suggesting their value in the region.⁹⁶ In 1630, trader William Claiborne recorded large quantities of beads made of local Roanoke and Peake among his trade goods, but no glass beads.⁹⁷ In 1705, Richard Beverly noted that English traders valued dark-purple Peake at eighteen pence per yard while white Peake went for nine pence.⁹⁸ Moreover, Beverly noted that "these sorts of Money have their rates set upon them as unalterable, and current as the value so four Money are."⁹⁹ It seems telling that as late as 1705 native-made shell beads were such a heavily traded commodity that English traders kept an eye on its price as a commodity in a way they did not with their own glass beads. Much later, in 1681, the Council of Maryland granted Virginia trader Cadwallader Jones a license to trade with

⁹⁵ Raphael Semmes, "The Ark and the Dove: Transcripts from the Public Record Office London," *Maryland Historical Magazine* 33, no. 1 (1938): 22.

⁹⁶ Edward Bland et al., *The Discovery of New Brittain: Began August 27, Anno Dom. 1650* (New York: Reprinted by J. Sabins and sons, 1873), 8-9; Turner, "Native American Protohistoric Interactions in the Powhatan Core Area," 81.

⁹⁷ Miller, Pogue, and Smolek, "Beads from the Seventeenth Century Chesapeake," 128; "Claiborne Vs. Cloberry Et Als. In the High Court of Admiralty," *Maryland Historical Magazine* XXVIII, no. 2 (1933): 178.

⁹⁸ Robert Beverly, *The History and Present State of Virginia*, ed. Loius B. Wright (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1947), 227.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 228.

the Nanticokes of the Eastern Shore to obtain Indian-made Roanoke and Peake beads.¹⁰⁰ That Jones should want shell beads suggests that they were still in high demand among inland groups.

While Wahunsonacock might have been truly impressed by blue beads and copper initially, his demands quickly turned to guns and metal knives. This changing desire seems to support Bruce Trigger's argument that early-contact exchange systems can best be understood as materialistic or rational and that romantic or culturally relativistic interpretations should be limited to the earliest of encounters.¹⁰¹ Miller (et al.) suggests European glass beads could not possess the cultural value of locally made shell beads and so were not in demand.¹⁰² Miller goes on to suggest that there may have been a supply-side problem with European beads. Instead of Indian disinterest, perhaps the lack of demand arose from English abandonment of the fur trade in favor of tobacco cultivation in the wake of Indian population decline from disease and beaver exhaustion. Both explanations seem problematic. Foreignness was usually a quality that enhanced the value of prestige goods. After all, most copper in the protohistoric Chesapeake came from the middle of the continent. Similarly, archaeological investigations reveal that shell beads were the most common grave good in mainland Maryland's ossuaries, though they were absent in ossuaries on the Eastern shore where such shells were manufactured for export.¹⁰³ Clearly, distance from production site was directly proportional to spiritual power and desirability when it came to prestige goods. Even so, European-made beads quickly fell out of

¹⁰⁰ Miller, Pogue, and Smolek, "Beads from the Seventeenth Century Chesapeake," 128; "Proceedings of the Council of Maryland, 1681-1685/6," in *Archives of Maryland*, ed. William Hand Browne (Baltimore: Maryland Historical Society, 1898).

¹⁰¹ Bruce Trigger, "Early Native North American Responses to European Contact: Romantic Versus Rationalistic Interpretations," *The Journal of American History* 77, no. 4 (March 1991): 1210.

¹⁰² Miller, Pogue, and Smolek, "Beads from the Seventeenth Century Chesapeake," 128.

¹⁰³ Curry, *Feast of the Dead: Aboriginal Ossuaries in Maryland*, 84, 95 note 16.

favor in Tsenacommacah despite their distant origins, and it seems that the Powhatans rejected European beads because they were inalterably and unpalatably European.

The Powhatans did not find European beads obviously useful, like guns and knives, or, like copper, malleable enough to imbue with spiritual power. It is important to remember that indigenous peoples in the Chesapeake were not passively impacted by the coming of European trade goods; they were active participants in adapting those trade goods for their own purposes. European-made glass beads were un-alterable and thus conveyed little spiritual power despite their foreignness. Copper on the other hand was malleable and could be changed into whatever form suited its indigenous recipients. It was rolled, pounded, cut up, strung on strings, and made into all kinds of adornments. In the early-contact period, the ethnocentrism of the Powhatan is evident in their rejection of unalterable European prestige goods, and their acceptance of malleable ones. The English were not trustworthy trading partners or allies. Rather, they were a source of prestige goods and were kept around as useful yet untrusted people.

It did not take the Powhatan leader long to realize that the English did not play by the rules of the gift-exchange economy, and he changed his approach and attitude towards the English accordingly. Instead of trying to engage them in a gift-exchange economy, he tried to force copper and other metal goods from them, particularly things he could not get anywhere else. As European copper flooded the market, the spiritual power of copper diminished and Wahunsonacock changed his demands from European items that conveyed spiritual power to items of temporal power, particularly guns.

Conclusion

This chapter demonstrates that by seeking to control the flow of copper into Tsenacommacah while simultaneously rejecting the use of European beads as symbolically important in his domestic politics, Wahunsonacock revealed a particularly informed and politically savvy approach to the English in Tsenacommacah. Prestige goods were the redistributive glue that held the various districts together through bonds of tribute, diplomacy and kinship. As Mallios points out, the Powhatans originally engaged with the English through diplomatic gift giving, but quickly learned that the English could not be relied upon to react appropriately in that kind of exchange. Wahunsonacock originally attempted to bring the English into the fold of Tsenacommacah and treat them as a subordinate chiefdom by relocating them close to his heartland, where he could control the prestige goods they produced and keep an eye on them. Within one year, however, it became clear that the English were not going to relocate to their new district and were increasing in number. For Wahunsonacock, the only reasonable thing to do was to attempt to keep the English within his control, but treat them as a different group--not a conquered indigenous chiefdom and not a trading partner, but a group that needed to be kept contained away from indigenous rivals yet not killed outright lest their prestige goods be lost. Ethnohistorical analysis of bead and copper consumption patterns suggest the English were seen as useful foreigners until their copper lost its power and it became clear they were flatly unwilling to trade guns. Unfortunately, by the time the copper market fell out and the gun embargo was clear, the English presence was too strong to eliminate.

Chapter 4 – Focused Violence: Wahunsonacock's Gambit and the Anglo-Powhatan Wars

For Wahunsonacock, the 1607 arrival of Englishmen in Paspahegh was too good an opportunity to ignore. Europeans had come to the shores of Tsenacommacah before, and they were usually willing to exchange powerful and useful trade goods for food and information. Despite the aggressive and sometimes odd behavior of the English strangers, the benefits of their trade proved too alluring for the Powhatan leader to pass up. More importantly, as the leader of the largest paramountcy on the eastern coast of North America, Wahunsonacock knew that non-engagement might prove even more dangerous. Tsenacommacah was not a redistributive commonwealth and many of Wahunsonacock's more recent conquests were happy to host the newcomers and reap the benefits of an English trading partner to the exclusion of Tsenacommacah. For indigenous groups such as the Monacans of the Virginia piedmont who lacked experience with European mariners and colonists, the English were an almost mythical people, who "came from under the earth" and should simply be avoided altogether. For a well-informed ruler like Wahunsonacock, non-engagement with the English was never an option.¹

For an expanding and aggressive paramountcy like Tsenacommacah, engagement often meant violence. Historians studying the Anglo-Powhatan Wars of the early-seventeenth-century Chesapeake often fall into one of two problematic camps. In the first 350 years after the violence that wracked early Virginia, historians often took the accounts of English observers at their word, repeating their assertions that the Powhatans under Wahunsonacock were an inherently

¹ Richter, "Tsenacommacah and the Atlantic World," 119; Hantman, "Caliban's Own Voice: American Indian Views of the Other in Colonial Virginia," 78; Rice, "Escape from Tsenacommacah: Chesapeake Algonquians and the Powhatan Menace."

treacherous people who plotted the extermination of the English “ancient planters” without cause, suggesting that violence was a predictable symptom of the Powhatans being Indians.² This school of thought stretches back to the Powhatan coup in 1622, which solidified European opinions about the native people of Virginia. After the 1622 attack, English missionary efforts stopped and idle colonists no longer ran away to live with the Indians. Samuel Purchase compared the English in Virginia with the “Holy Patriarchs... in Canaan” and saw the coup as the event that “confiscated whatsoever remainders of right the unnaturall Naturalls had, and made both them and their Countrey wholly English.”³ For the English in Virginia that survived the attack, “the treacherous violence of the savages” absolved any need to treat the Powhatans with “gentlenesse and fiare usage.”⁴ Until remarkably recently, most historians agreed with Sir Francis Wyatt who wrote in 1623, “Our first worke is expulsion of the Salvages to gaine the free range of the country for increase of Cattle, swine &c which will more then restore us, for it is infinitely better to have no heathen among us, who at best were but thornes in our sides, then to be at peace and league with them.”⁵

After the 1960s, ethnohistorians studying the early Chesapeake tended to re-focus attention on European provocations to violence and portray the Powhatans as embattled

² Some historians, such as James Mooney, were careful to avoid such racist characterizations. Mooney argued that the Powhatans were indeed treacherous but that their attitudes were justified because of their prior experience with treacherous Europeans. Mooney pointed out that upon the arrival of the English the Powhatans “already knew and hated whites.” As chapter two points out, Mooney was certainly correct about the extent of Powhatan knowledge, but as this chapter points out, he overstated Powhatan rage prior to 1607. Mooney, “The Powhatan Confederacy, Past and Present,” 129.

³ Samuel Purchas, “Virginia’s Verger,” in *Hakluytus Posthumus or Purchas His Pilgrimes* (Glasgow: James MacLehose and Sons, 1905-1907), 229.

⁴ Edward Waterhouse, “A Declaration of the State of the Colony in Virginia,” in *Records of the Virginia Company, 1606-1626*, ed. Susan Myra Kingsbury (Washington DC: Government Printing Office, 1933 [1622]), 556.

⁵ “Letters of Sir Francis Wyatt, Governor of Virginia, 1621-1626,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 2nd Series, no. 6 (1926): 118; Alden T. Vaughn, ““Expulsion of the Savages”: English Policy and the Virginia Massacre of 1622,” *ibid.* 35, no. 1 (1978).

defenders of a culture under attack.⁶ In the process, the Powhatans morphed from a violent empire into a passive confederacy beset by starving and well-armed Englishmen who demanded ever more food and eventually the land itself.⁷ While challenging the racist assertions of the “ancient planters” was a welcome revision, suggesting that a small band of starving Englishmen easily overwhelmed the largest paramountcy on the coast of North America oversimplifies the landscape and inaccurately renders the leaders of Tsenacommacah inept, ignorant and overawed. Moreover, in an effort to find the particular instance of English aggression or foolishness that led to violence, the diverse, and often hostile, indigenous peoples of the Chesapeake become a unified group of victims fighting to survive. While the English certainly provoked the Anglo-Powhatan Wars of the seventeenth century, focusing entirely on Anglo provocations and Powhatan reactions leaves no room for indigenous decision making and contingency. Instead, it places an often starving and defenseless English outpost in a position of dominance over a paramountcy that could command thousands of warriors.⁸

From the arrival of the first English colonists in 1607 to the Powhatan Coup of 1622, early-contact Tsenacommacah was a thoroughly native ground on the edge of an expanding Atlantic world. As such, the Powhatans who lived there were preoccupied with more than how the arrival of the English might fit into their paramountcy. The English were only one of a host

⁶ J. Frederick Fausz, "An 'Abundance of Blood Shed on Both Sides': England's First Indian War, 1609-1614," *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* XCVIII(1990): 3; "Opechancanough: Indian Resistance Leader," 34; Jennings, *The Invasion of America: Indians, Colonialism, and the Cant of Conquest*, 78-82; Cave, *Lethal Encounters : Englishmen and Indians in Colonial Virginia*, 167.

⁷ Lurie, "Indian Cultural Adjustment to European Civilization."

⁸ Works that stress English aggression include: Vaughn, "'Expulsion of the Savages': English Policy and the Virginia Massacre of 1622; Cave, *Lethal Encounters : Englishmen and Indians in Colonial Virginia*.

of threats and opportunities facing Tsenacommacah in 1607.⁹ The violence that marred early Virginia, while described as incoherent and random by English observers, takes on a new meaning when considered from the perspective of a growing indigenous paramountcy looking to exploit a new source of power on the edge of an expanding Atlantic world. Looking through the lens of an expanding paramountcy experienced in dealing with outsiders, the violence of 1607-1622 becomes less a struggle to expel English intruders or protect threatened cultural identity and more a sophisticated foreign policy designed to keep the English in a subordinate and controllable position within Tsenacommacah.

Initial Violence – Summer 1607

The fleet of three English ships carrying the “ancient planters” of Jamestown arrived in Tsenacommacah around four in the morning on April 26th, 1607. The reconnaissance party that went ashore to explore the southern coast of the Chesapeake Bay found themselves under attack by nightfall of that same day. George Percy who was among those who went ashore described the attackers as “Savages creeping upon all foure, from the Hills like Beares, with their Bowes in their mouths.”¹⁰ English guns quickly drove back the five attackers who had only managed to wound two of the English explorers before their arrows ran out.¹¹ For the next several weeks, the English continued to explore up the Chesapeake and into the Powhatan (James) River, meeting several different groups of Indians including the Kecoughtans, Quiyoughcohannocks, and

⁹ For an examination of the non-Powhatan indigenous peoples of the Chesapeake and their struggles against the ascendant Wahunsonacock, see: Rice, "Escape from Tsenacommacah: Chesapeake Algonquians and the Powhatan Menace."

¹⁰ Percy, "Observations Gathered out of a Discourse of the Plantation of the Southern Colonie in Virginia by the English 1606," 134.

¹¹ Ibid; Smith, "The Proceedings of the English Colonie in Virginia, [1606-1612]," 205.

Paspaheghs and being “entertained by them very kindly” at each meeting.¹² Despite the kind treatment and hospitality they encountered along the James River, the memory of that first violent encounter kept the English on edge. They were right to be anxious. By the middle of May the English settlement would be under attack by a force of over 200 Powhatans. Historians typically explain the Powhatans’ rapidly changing attitude toward the English - switching from initial violence in April to warm friendship in May followed by a surprise attack in mid-May and back to friendship in mid-June - as a time of testing by the Powhatan, or as evidence that the constituent members of Tsenacommacah were left to deal with the English as they saw fit and did so in various ways.¹³ However, situating the events of 1607 within a native ground, and on the edge of an Atlantic world, reveals that the attacks were more than crude testing of English defenses or ad-hoc reactions by disparate werowances. Instead, the attacks were part of a coordinated plan to incorporate the English into Tsenacommacah on indigenous terms.

English perceptions of indigenous people were still in flux before they arrived in Virginia. As historians Alfred Cave and Karen Kupperman point out, the English expected to find either simple-minded rustics ready for instruction in English religion and culture or savage brutes who would forcefully resist any attempt to take their land. When the people in America proved to be complex political thinkers who did not fall into either of those groups, the English grew nervous. As idealized notions of noble savages balanced against stories of bloodthirsty savages in the minds of the early settlers, eyewitnesses often struggled to reconcile their

¹² Percy, "Observations Gathered out of a Discourse of the Plantation of the Southern Colonie in Virginia by the English 1606," 135.

¹³ Rountree, *Pocahontas's People: The Powhatan Indians of Virginia through Four Centuries*, 29; "The Powhatans and the English: A Case of Multiple Conflicting Agendas," 179; Horn, *A Land as God Made It: Jamestown and the Birth of America*, 52; Steele, *Warpaths: Invasions of North America*, 41; Oberg, *Dominion and Civility: English Imperialism and Native America, 1585-1685*, 56.

expectations with what they saw.¹⁴ In George Percy's 1607 account of his arrival in Virginia, it is clear that he was somewhat surprised every time Indians greeted the English with hospitality. For example, when he met Chief Choapock of the Quiyoughcohannocks, Percy felt it was worth noting that the chief "entertained us in so modest a proud fashion, as though he had beene a Prince of a civil government, holding his countenance without laughter or any such ill behavior."¹⁵ On the other hand, Percy did not speculate, elaborate, or express any surprise after five Indians attacked an exploratory party on August 26th of the same year.

Most English observers shared Percy's expectation of treachery when it came to the indigenous Virginians. Karen Kupperman points out that English expectations of treachery did not arise out of a racialized expectation of "natural" treachery but instead from an appreciation of the Powhatans' position. Instead of a dismissal, Kupperman argues that English perceptions of treachery were born of a kind of respect. The Indians proved intelligent and as such the English reasoned they would necessarily be treacherous in their dealings with newcomers.¹⁶ After all, the English would be treacherous if they were in the Powhatan's position. The English often saw themselves reflected in the actions of the Powhatans. While English accounts often reflected their own ethnocentric anxieties, they were often right to be suspicious. Wahunsonacock did not hammer together the disparate chiefdoms of Tsenacommacah through kindness. The surviving

¹⁴ Cave, *Lethal Encounters : Englishmen and Indians in Colonial Virginia*, xiv, 3.

¹⁵ Percy, "Observations Gathered out of a Discourse of the Plantation of the Southern Colonie in Virginia by the English 1606," 137.

¹⁶ Kupperman, "English Perceptions of Treachery, 1583-1640: The Case of the American 'Savages'," 286; Cave, *Lethal Encounters : Englishmen and Indians in Colonial Virginia*, 25.

English accounts reveal a paramountcy that was certainly as politically canny, ethnocentric, and unyielding as the English themselves.¹⁷

The Paspahugh "Gift of Land"

While the initial attack at Cape Henry quickly followed by friendly trade stoked the unease of the English colonists. It also highlights the difficulty of presenting a simple narrative about what happened in Tsenacommacah in the early days of English settlement.¹⁸ Political maneuvering and duplicitous negotiations were hallmarks of both the English and the Powhatans. While the initial attack might be dismissed as an overreaction by a small band of hunters, the next violent encounter between the two groups was well orchestrated and deliberate.

Several weeks after their initial landing at Cape Henry, the English decided on a permanent settlement site 40 miles up the James River where the water seemed fresh and the land seemed defensible. On May 14th, the English disembarked on the small isthmus that would become known as Jamestown Island. The Paspahughs controlled the land, the same people who had killed the Spanish Jesuits who also chose to plant on their land in 1570 with the aid of Paquiquineo. A subsidiary chiefdom within the Powhatan paramountcy of Tsenacommacah, the Paspahughs were led by the werowance Wowinchopunk. The werowance certainly heard about, and may have experienced, the ferocity of the Spanish galleons sent to revenge the murdered

¹⁷ Lurie, "Indian Cultural Adjustment to European Civilization," 38-39; Fausz, "An 'Abundance of Blood Shed on Both Sides': England's First Indian War, 1609-1614," 13; James Horn, "The Conquest of Eden: Possession and Dominion in Early Virginia," in *Envisioning an English Empire: Jamestown and the Making of the North Atlantic World*, ed. Robert Appelbaum and John Wood Sweet (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005), 47.

¹⁸ Edmund Morgan finds it so difficult he instructs the reader to "Skip over the first couple of years, when it was easy for Englishmen to make mistakes in the strange new world...and look at Jamestown in the winter of 1609-10" where he believes the real history begins. Edmund S. Morgan, *American Slavery, American Freedom: The Ordeal of Colonial Virginia* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1975), 72.

Jesuits some 30 years ago. Wowinchopunck arrived with his retainer on May 18th, 1607 and “made signes that he would give us as much land as we would desire to take.”¹⁹ Percy noted anxiously that Wowinchopunck wanted the English to put aside their weapons during their meeting, but that he was not fooled by such an obvious ambush. The meeting ended with a fight over a stolen hatchet that prompted the Indians to leave in a huff. The Paspahegh’s came to Jamestown two more times in the coming days, offering deer and perhaps reconciliation, but the English remained skeptical of their intentions and were sure the offers of trade were made “more in villanie than any love they bare us.”²⁰ In the coming years, proximity made the Paspaheghs increasingly hostile towards the English.

A Surprise Attack

In an effort to obey the instructions of the Virginia Company not to antagonize the locals, President Edward Maria Wingfield forbade the construction of palisades or other potentially provocative defensive buildings upon landing in Paspahegh territory.²¹ Wingfield’s controversial decision proved unwise when the Paspaheghs, supported by several other chiefdoms, attacked the Jamestown settlement on May 27th with 200 warriors. Luckily for the English, the ships that brought them to Tsenacommacah were still at anchor in the river and their cannons drove the raiders back after the loss of only two men.²² After the attack, the English set to building a substantial, triangle-shaped fort for protection. The attack was particularly troubling

¹⁹ Percy, "Observations Gathered out of a Discourse of the Plantation of the Southern Colonie in Virginia by the English 1606," 138.

²⁰ Ibid., 138-40.

²¹ Cave, *Lethal Encounters : Englishmen and Indians in Colonial Virginia*, 28; Smith, "The Generall Historie of Virginia, New-England, and the Summer Isles," 138.

²² Archer, "Relatyon of the Discovery of Our River," 115-16.

for the English because it came after a period of “kindly” visits in Jamestown. During the attack, several of the principal men in the colony, including John Smith and Christopher Newport, were on an exploratory trip trading and being lavishly entertained by various werowances all along the James River.

Sir Walter Cope noted the conspicuous attack on James Fort came only after the Indians “found [the English] began to plant and fortify.”²³ Cope’s letter confirms the argument that the attack on the English was intended not to eradicate them, but to convince them to move farther up river instead of setting up permanently among the Paspaheghs.²⁴ The attack on Jamestown of May 25th, 1607 was similar in many ways to the attack the English suffered at Cape Henry. Both attacks were meant to drive the English closer to the heart of Tsenacommacah. Wahunsonacock hoped to make the English weigh their harsh treatment in Paspahegh territory against the kind treatment their leaders received further upriver. Instead of a test, the attack was a strategic push.

The Heart of Tsenacommacah

While the English explorers were visiting with the Powhatans on their trip upriver, Wahunsonacock’s son, Parahunt, assured the English that an enemy group outside Tsenacommacah, the Chesapeakees were responsible for the attack they suffered upon their initial arrival at Cape Henry.²⁵ Parahunt pretended to be his father during his meeting with the English, who believed they had met with the Great Powhatan. Wahunsonacock did not reveal his true

²³ "Sir Walter Cope to Robert Cecil, Early of Salisbury, 12 August 1607," in *The Jamestown Voyages under the First Charter: 1609-1609*, ed. Philip L Barbour (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), 110.

²⁴ Fausz, "An 'Abundance of Blood Shed on Both Sides': England's First Indian War, 1609-1614," 13.

²⁵ Ibid., 12.

identity until mid-June. In fact, he would not meet an Englishman in person for another six months, when his brother Opechancanough brought the captive John Smith before him in December of 1607. It is unlikely that Parahunt would impersonate his father without the mamanatowick's permission and the rouse seems to have been part of Wahunsonacock's efforts to determine what the English wanted in Tsenacommacah and how long they intended to stay. It is telling that Parahunt blamed the attack the English suffered at Cape Henry on the Chesapeakes instead of suggesting a simple misunderstanding or an unruly band of hunters. In future negotiations with the English, Wahunsonacock would often blame such small-scale attacks on uncontrollable commoners or wayward werowances. In this case, however, Parahunt blamed the Chesapeakes, with whom the Powhatans were at odds and would soon exterminate.²⁶ By implicating a rival group instead of simply dismissing the incident, Parahunt reveals something of the political situation in Tsenacommacah. It was not enough to simply trade with the English, it was important to keep them from trading with the Powhatans enemies.

By telling the English that the Chesapeakes were responsible, Parahunt cast the Powhatans and their lavish hospitality as uniquely friendly in the area, implicitly stating for the first time a narrative that Wahunsonacock would later make explicit: the Powhatans were friendly and their indigenous rivals were dangerous, making it better for the English to stay near Tsenacommacah and avoid rival nations. Parahunt was happy to hear the English proclaim that they would be his ally against the Monacans, but when John Smith and Christopher Newport

²⁶ David Quinn goes even farther and suggests that Wahunsonacock organized the attack at Point Comfort to keep the English from discovering his killing of the Chesapeakes and their English refugee guests. Rountree, *Pocahontas's People: The Powhatan Indians of Virginia through Four Centuries*, 21-23.

tried to convince Parahunt to show them the way to the Monacans, he “sought by all means to dissuade” their actually making contact.²⁷

Most historians gloss the Powhatans’ two approaches to the English - attacking and entertaining - either as “testing” the English or as the actions of disparate chiefdoms that were not part of a larger organized Powhatan response to the English presence.²⁸ Both of these explanations are inadequate. It is unclear why Wahunsonacock would need to “test” the English. By 1607, the paramount chief was familiar with Europeans and their technology. The Powhatans had been dealing with Europeans for years. They knew from first-hand experience about guns, European trade goods, and how Europeans conducted themselves. Moreover, they could tell the settlement at Jamestown was different from other transient visits from trading ships.

Wahunsonacock was certainly curious about how long they intended to stay in Tsenacommacah, but he knew the sort of people he was dealing with before the *Susan Constant* first arrived. Moreover, while the first attack at Cape Henry may be dismissed as the un-licensed actions of a local werowance or curious hunters, the attack of May 25th was clearly coordinated. Indeed, the guide Parahunt provided to lead the English back to Jamestown abandoned the party just before they arrived at their destination. The guide proved “a very trusty friend” several times before he suddenly abandoned the party with “many kinde circumstances.”²⁹ The guide’s departure suggests that he was aware of what the English would find when they arrived back at their camp and wanted to avoid retribution or difficult questions.

²⁷ Archer, “Relatyon of the Discovery of Our River,” 109; Smith, “A True Relation [1608],” 31.

²⁸ Rountree, *The Powhatan Indians of Virginia: Their Traditional Culture*, 86; Horn, *A Land as God Made It: Jamestown and the Birth of America*, 52.

²⁹ Archer, “Relatyon of the Discovery of Our River,” 109, 14-15; Smith, “A True Relation [1608],” 31.

George Percy, who was with the English party exploring upriver during the attack on Jamestown, recorded that the Pamunkeys entertaining his party at the falls were “murmuring at our plating in the Countrie.” The local werowance silenced the Pamunkey’s complaints and asked “Why should you bee offended with them as long as they hurt you not, nor take any thing away by force, they take but a little waste ground, which doth you nor any of us any good.”³⁰ This quote is often cited as the Powhatan’s tacit acceptance that the English were welcome to the land surrounding Jamestown. However, several elements of the exchange suggest that something more complex was happening. First, it is unlikely that Pamunkey commoners would care if the Paspahegh gave away a small part of their land. Moreover, it is unlikely that anyone in Pamunkey would “murmur” openly in front of foreign visitors. Powhatan werowances listened to priests and other councilors when making decisions, but they expected deference when in the presence of foreigners.³¹ Open “murmuring” seems unlikely, unless it was orchestrated for the benefit of the English visitors. The Pamunkey leader’s assertion that his people should not be upset about the English settlement was intended more for the English than for his own people. It was likely meant as a subtle declaration that the English should re-settle closer to the heart of Tsenacommacah on good land, not “waste land.” It was not typical for Powhatan leadership to display a fractured front to outsiders. Indeed, the murmuring may have been orchestrated as part of a plan to encourage the English to move. In silencing his people’s complaints, the Pamunkey werowance sought to convince the English that they would be better treated deeper within Tsenacommacah.

³⁰ Percy, "Observations Gathered out of a Discourse of the Plantation of the Southern Colonie in Virginia by the English 1606," 141.

³¹ Rountree, *The Powhatan Indians of Virginia : Their Traditional Culture*, 119.

It is unclear why the English who went upriver were so well entertained by the Powhatans if attack was their plan all along. Some historians, as well as John Smith himself, suggest the Powhatans designed the ruse to keep the exploratory party away from the attack on Jamestown. This seems unlikely as the presence of the few men in Smith's party at James Fort would have been unlikely to alter the outcome in a military struggle, no matter what John Smith thought of his own military prowess. Another suggested reason is that the Paspahegh attacked Jamestown for local reasons and were not sanctioned by Wahunsonacock. This seems unlikely considering the suspicious flight of the Pamunkey guide and given the difficulty the Paspaheghs would have in raising an allied force of 200 bowmen by themselves. Instead of these theories, the different approaches, both violent and welcoming, seem designed to push the English away from their chosen location in Paspahegh territory and towards easily-controlled central Tsenacommacah. Indeed, a desire to move the English out of the Paspaheghs' territory and into the heart of Tsenacommacah comes up again and again in the early-contact period. Once the English actually met Wahunsonacock, one of his first suggestions was that the English move closer to his capital at Werowocomoco.³² Here again, by looking at the Powhatans as an ascendant Algonquian group looking to control a potential source of European trade goods, the attacks of the early days begin to make sense.

Changing Powhatan Tactics

In the weeks after the initial attack, Indians hidden in the tall grasses surrounding the fort picked off "disorderly straggling" Englishmen who wandered outside the fort with regularity.³³

³² Smith, "A True Relation [1608]," 57.

³³ "The Generall Historie of Virginia, New-England, and the Summer Isles," 138-39; Archer, "Relatyon of the Discovery of Our River," 115-16.

Sporadic attacks continued throughout the summer alongside attempts at negotiation by unarmed indigenous envoys who described themselves as enemies of the hiding attackers.³⁴ For the English, the difficulty of distinguishing which groups, if any, were truly friendly in Tsenacommacah contributed to already high levels of paranoia. For the Powhatans, the attacks served a diplomatic purpose. By alternating attacks and offers of friendship, Wahunsonacock hoped to force the English into Tsenacommacah on his terms.

On June 14th, less than a month after the surprise attack of May 25th, werowances and envoys from several of the chiefdoms who had entertained the English so lavishly on their trip upriver arrived in Jamestown to explain the events of the past month and to “certify us who were our friends and who foes.”³⁵ The Indian councilors advised the English that the Pamunkey, Arrohattoc, Youghtanud, and Mattaponi, would be their allies against the attackers who had been the Paspahegh, Tapahanauk (Quiyoughcohannock), Wyanauck (Weyanock), Apamatecoh (Appamattuck or Appomattox), and Chescaik (Kiskiac). Those groups reported to be allies to the English were part of Wahunsonacock’s personal inheritance, the heart Tsenacommacah, including his own tribe, the Pamunkey. Those groups the Powhatan envoys listed as enemies to the English were also constituent members of Tsenacommacah, however, they lived either in the lands immediately surrounding Jamestown or on the fringes of Tsenacommacah. The implication was that the English would be safer at the heart of Tsenacommacah among their friends.

³⁴ "Relatyon of the Discovery of Our River," 117.

³⁵ Ibid.

As the mamanatowick, Wahunsonacock did not usually intervene in inter-chiefdom rivalries. However, tolerance of internal competition did not preclude the paramount chief from organizing his rival districts for a unified attack when necessary. Wahunsonacock's power to direct foreign policy or to command the actions of his people has been a subject of debate since the seventeenth century. Observers at the time noted both that he had only the power to persuade and that he had the power of life and death over his people. Within the core of Tsenacommacah, Wahunsonacock's word was law, while among fringe or recently acquired territories he needed to sweeten his requests with gifts. In either case, he ruled by custom and was accustomed to being obeyed.³⁶ On the rare occasion when the paramount chief ordered mass attacks, participation was not voluntary. Werowances pressed Powhatan men into service and Wahunsonacock expected warriors to be ready within a day's notice to "serve the great king."³⁷ Orders from the mamanatowick to amass large fighting forces seem to have trumped local rivalries. For example, the multi-district group that attacked Jamestown in May of 1607 contained both the Weyanocks and the Paspahighs, two groups that were "at oddes" to such a degree that there had been bloodshed between the two. Still, when Wahunsonacock sent out the word, they both responded and attacked the English together.³⁸ Only the mamanatowick had the political or economic wherewithal to bring a combined force of 200 warriors against James Fort. Indeed, the Paspahigh were the only group on the Powhatan envoy's enemies list that had any reason to attack the English, as they were the only ones with extensive experience with the

³⁶ Gleach, *Powhatan's World and Colonial Virginia: A Conflict of Cultures*, 30-32; Rountree, *Powhatan Foreign Relations: 1500-1722*, 10-12; Morgan, *American Slavery, American Freedom: The Ordeal of Colonial Virginia*, 49-50.

³⁷ Strachey, *The Historie of Travell into Virginia Britania (1612)*, 104; Rountree, *The Powhatan Indians of Virginia: Their Traditional Culture*, 122.

³⁸ Archer, "Relatyon of the Discovery of Our River," 103.

English in May of 1607. The English had neither attacked nor forced trade on the Quiyoughcohannock, Weyanock, Appamattuck or Kiskiack when the attack took place.

The outcome of the attack also suggests that the Powhatans meant the strategic violence to push, not exterminate, the English. In Powhatan warfare, typically only men were killed while women and children were captured and later adopted.³⁹ Rather than attempting the total destruction of one's enemy, Powhatan practice was usually to provide the enemy with a violent "hint" - a large-scale attack that would induce the enemy to withdraw.⁴⁰ The 200 bowmen deployed upon the English were more than enough to kill the whole of the settlement, particularly due to the fact that the bowmen caught the English unaware, their guns still packed away in barrels when the attack occurred.⁴¹ Months later, a similarly sized band of Powhatans were able to leave two Englishmen dead and "shot full of arrows" so quickly that they were unable to give so much as a warning shout to John Smith who was only a short distance away.⁴² The Powhatan bowmen were certainly good enough shots that they could have done more than kill two and wound twelve largely unarmed men had their goal been to wipe out the settlement. The Powhatans were almost certainly surprised by how furiously the English were able to defend themselves with the help of their ship's cannons. Wahunsonacock had hoped to demonstrate his power to the English through force of arms as he had with the recently incorporated Kecoughtans.⁴³ While demonstrating the difficulty of intimidating the English by force, the

³⁹ Rountree, *The Powhatan Indians of Virginia: Their Traditional Culture*, 121; Smith, "A Map of Virginia [1612]," 166.

⁴⁰ Rountree, *Pocahontas's People: The Powhatan Indians of Virginia through Four Centuries*, 19-20.

⁴¹ Smith, "A True Relation [1608]," 31-32.

⁴² "The Generall Historie of Virginia, New-England, and the Summer Isles," 147.

⁴³ Rice, "Escape from Tsenacommacah: Chesapeake Algonquians and the Powhatan Menace," 109-10.

English settlement's stiff resistance only reinforced Wahunsonacock's desire to bring English trade goods, particularly guns, into his reach.⁴⁴

In mid-June, word came from Wahunsonacock himself that he desired peace with the English and that the werowances of Paspahegh would cease their attacks. The Powhatan leader assured the English that they "would sow and reap in peace or else he would make wars upon them [the Paspahegh and Quiyoughcohannock.]"⁴⁵ The mid-June peace offering is evidence that Wahunsonacock was very capable of setting clear foreign policies regarding the English; policies that were obeyed by his subordinates. Moreover, William Strachey reported that Wahunsonacock kept a close eye on English movements, keeping sentinels in the woods that quickly relayed messages to him whenever a ship arrived or left the fort.⁴⁶ Looking at Tsenacommacah within its indigenous rather than Anglo-centric context, the actions of the Powhatans upon first contact become more coherent. The attack of May 25th makes sense as part of a large-scale plan to move the English closer to the heart of Tsenacommacah where they could be watched closely and not be tempted to offer their trade goods to rival indigenous groups.

Incorporating the English in Tsenacommacah (1607-1609)

Had Wahunsonacock wished to exterminate the English, he certainly could have in the late summer of 1607. The ships that had provided protective fire in May returned to England and

⁴⁴ Gallivan, *James River Chiefdoms : The Rise of Social Inequality in the Chesapeake*, 164.

⁴⁵ Edward Maria Wingfield, "A Discourse of Virginia Per Edward Maria Wingfield," in *Jamestown Narratives: Eyewitness Accounts of the Virginia Colony: The First Decade 1607-1617*, ed. Edward Wright Haile (Champlain, VA: Roundhouse, 2007), 184.

⁴⁶ Strachey, *The Historie of Travell into Virginia Britania (1612)*, 58.

the colonists inside James Fort were so sick that George Percy reported they had “not... five able men to man our Bulwarkes upon any occasion.”⁴⁷ Percy goes on to remark that all the English would have surely died of “mere famine” had not “God... put a terror in the Savages hearts... to relieve us with victuals, as Bread, Corne, Fish, and Flesh in great plenty.”⁴⁸ By the onset of winter, less than 40 of the original 104 English colonists were still alive.⁴⁹ What Percy ascribed to divine intervention, was actually Wahunsonacock’s decision to keep the English in Tsenacommacah. If the English all died, they would be useless as trading partners. Moreover, Wahunsonacock had experienced European arms, and surely remembered the retribution of Governor Menendez and the Spanish upon finding the murdered Jesuits among the Paspaheghs in 1572. For the Powhatans, providing relief for the English was the most reasonable course of action.

When supplies ran low in Jamestown, John Smith, who had by then been appointed Cape Merchant in charge of obtaining supplies, set off in search of friendly groups with whom to trade. Finding little help from the nearby tribes, Smith traveled downstream until he reached the Kecoughtans at the mouth of the Powhatan (James) River. The Kecoughtans also refused to trade with him and “at first they scorned him, as a famished man and would in derision offer him a handful of Corne...for [English] swords and muskets.”⁵⁰ Smith reported that rather than take what he wanted by force, he forced the Kecoughtans to trade by running his boat on shore while firing his muskets in a flamboyant demonstration that he had the power to take what he wanted if

⁴⁷ Percy, "Observations Gathered out of a Discourse of the Plantation of the Southern Colonie in Virginia by the English 1606," 144.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 144-45.

⁴⁹ Smith, "A True Relation [1608]," 33; "The Proceedings of the English Colonie in Virginia, [1606-1612]," 210.

⁵⁰ "The Generall Historie of Virginia, New-England, and the Summer Isles," 144; "A True Relation [1608]," 35.

he wished. Impressed and terrified, the Kecoughtans relented and loaded Smith's ship with corn in exchange for copper and hatchets. According to Smith, his gunboat diplomacy worked because it demonstrated both his ability to use excessive force, as well engage in fair trade.

When the food he had extorted from the Kecoughtans ran low, Smith traveled up-river to the Chickahominies and found much more favorable terms for trade. Instead of being forced to rely on gun-boat diplomacy, Smith found the Chickahominies willing and eager to trade with him. The Chickahominies were not members of Tsenacommacah, and thus not subject to instructions handed down from Wahunsonacock and his advisors. By trading with the English, the Chickahominy bolstered their prestige and independence from Tsenacommacah. A close trading relationship between the English and the Chickahominies would interfere with Wahunsonacock's policy of hiring Chickahominy warriors with copper, and, more importantly, made his long-term goal of annexing the Chickahominies more difficult.⁵¹ As a chiefdom on the fringe of Tsenacommacah, it seems likely that the Kecoughtans, like the Chickahominies, would seek out trade with the English to help them in their struggle against Wahunsonacock. However, the werowance of the Kecoughtans was a son of Wahunsonacock who had been installed as recently as 1597 when the paramount chief conquered the original inhabitants after their elderly werowance died. In an effort to ensure the Kecoughtans remained loyal, he re-located the original inhabitants "quartering them amongst his own people."⁵² The Powhatan leader relocated the Kecoughtans to lands north of the York River previously inhabited by the Piankatank (who had also been recently conquered by the Powhatans) and loyal Powhatans moved to Kecoughtan

⁵¹ Strachey, *The Historie of Travell into Virginia Britania* (1612), 68-69; Rountree, *The Powhatan Indians of Virginia: Their Traditional Culture*, 140.

⁵² Strachey, *The Historie of Travell into Virginia Britania* (1612), 68.

territory at the mouth of the James River.⁵³ By trading with the Chickahominies John Smith demonstrated how upsetting English trade goods could be to the balance of power in Tsenacommacah. To prevent English trade goods from further emboldening his rivals, Wahunsonacock was forced to try a new tactic to bring the English into Tsenacommacah.

John Smith becomes Nantaquoud

In the winter of 1607-1608, the Powhatan tried to convince the English that the violence of the previous summer had been a mistake and that the English would be very well-served to become full members of Tsenacommacah and relocate closer to the heart of Tsenacommacah. Attacks by the Paspaheghs stopped, as promised, and the English were pleasantly surprised that the Powhatans' offer of peace "fell out true."⁵⁴ After three more successful trading trips to the Chickahominies in November, John Smith explored deep into Powhatan territory, seeking the head of the Chickahominy River. Smith left Jamestown on December 10, 1607 with a crew of seven. Just beyond the town of Apokant, on the fringe of Chickahominy territory, shallow water forced Smith to abandon his barge and recruit two Chickahominies with a canoe to paddle the small English company further upriver.⁵⁵ Some 20 miles upriver from Apokant, Smith went ashore with one of his Indian guides, leaving the other Chickahominy man and two Englishmen behind with the canoe. Within 15 minutes of leaving the shore, Smith reported hearing Indian cries in the wilderness and grabbed his Chickahominy guide as a human shield. Within minutes, a group of Powhatan warriors composed of over 200 men and led by Wahunsonacock's brother and eventual successor, Opechancanough, surrounded Smith. Smith held off the Powhatans with

⁵³ Smith, "A Map of Virginia [1612]," 175.

⁵⁴ Wingfield, "A Discourse of Virginia Per Edward Maria Wingfield," 184.

⁵⁵ Smith, "A True Relation [1608]," 43-45, 21.

his pistol and a Chickahominy human-shield, but after being pierced in the thigh with an arrow and falling into a mire, the Powhatans captured the captain. Smith was spared, he says, because he had his Chickahominy guide, which made it clear that he was of high rank. The two men who stayed with the canoe were, however, killed.⁵⁶

The sudden attack and capture of John Smith came without warning. The Powhatans and English had been at peace for five months and other than Smith's provocations among the Kecoughtans, there was little to suggest the peace would be broken. While many authors argue that Smith unfortunately encountered a Powhatan hunting party and was captured, it is unclear if the party he encountered was hunting for deer or John Smith.⁵⁷ The many trips Smith's ship made trading along the Chickahominy and James Rivers did not go unnoticed by the Powhatan leadership. It is more likely that Wahunsonacock or Opechancanough orchestrated Smith's capture to ascertain his identity and his people's goals in Tsenacommacah. After certifying that Smith was indeed who he said he was, Opechancanough marched him through several towns on the Virginia Peninsula between the James and Chickahominy Rivers. The Powhatans treated Smith well, feeding and entertaining him lavishly at every stop, all signs that he was being treated as a potential ally, not a captured enemy.⁵⁸ Presenting him to various werowances and

⁵⁶ Ibid., 45-46; "The Generall Historie of Virginia, New-England, and the Summer Isles," 146-47; Wingfield, "A Discourse of Virginia Per Edward Maria Wingfield," 195.

⁵⁷ Smith learned that he was taken prisoner by a multi-chiefdom hunting party later when he extracted the information by threatening to torture an Indian captive. Smith, "A True Relation [1608]," 91; Horn, *A Land as God Made It: Jamestown and the Birth of America*, 62.

⁵⁸ In Smith's *True Relation*, written immediately after his capture, he says he was well-treated during his captivity. It is only in his *General History*, written several years later in 1624 that he mentions being threatened with death several times during his capture.

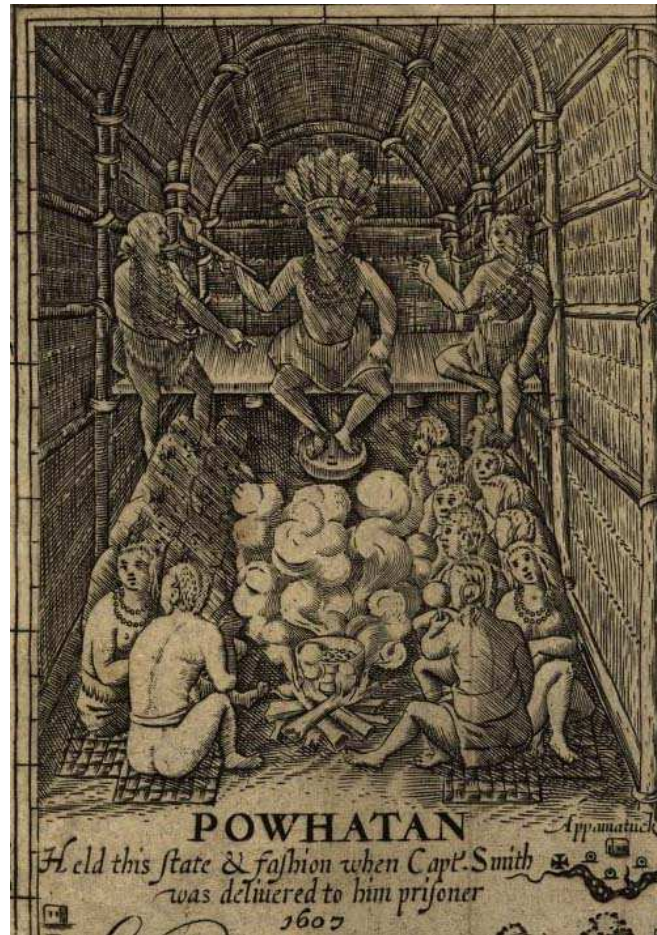
priests who tried to ascertain whether he was to be trusted, Opechancanough eventually presented him to Wahunsonacock at his seat on the York River, Werowocomoco.⁵⁹

Surrounded by his chief advisors in full regalia, as well as an equal number of young women with heads painted red and draped with pearls, Wahunsonacock gave John Smith an opulent welcome. The reception impressed even the cynical Smith who remarked that the paramount chief conducted himself with “such a grave and Majesticall countenance, as drave me into admiration to see such state in a naked Salvage.”⁶⁰ Wahunsonacock asked Smith what he was doing in Tsenacommacah and how long he intended to stay. According to his own account, Smith lied and said that his party had been shipwrecked after a fight with the Spanish and that they had been forced to camp in Paspahegh until Captain Newport, who Smith described as his father, returned. When Wahunsonacock asked why shipwreck victims explored so widely up the James and Chickahominy Rivers, Smith replied that Monacans killed Captain Newport’s son and that the English explorers were looking to revenge his death. Smith had learned from Parahunt the previous May that the Monacans were enemies of the Powhatans, now he used that knowledge in an attempt to please Wahunsonacock. Wahunsonacock seemed satisfied by Smith’s answers and the two men went on to discuss the relative size of their people’s dominions and possessions, both attempting to impress and intimidate the other.⁶¹

⁵⁹ Rountree, *Pocahontas's People: The Powhatan Indians of Virginia through Four Centuries*, 36-37.

⁶⁰ Smith, "A True Relation [1608]," 53. It is important to note that Smith’s use of “naked” here means without the several layers of clothing that the English used as markers of social position. It does not mean entirely without clothing. References to nudity in the modern sense used the phrase, “*stark* naked.” Karen Ordahl Kupperman, "Presentment of Civility: English Reading of American Self-Presentation in the Early Years of Colonization," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 54, no. 1 (1997): 199-202.

⁶¹ Smith, "A True Relation [1608]," 53-57. "The Generall Historie of Virginia, New-England, and the Summer Isles," 261. In his 1624 *General History*, Smith writes that this meeting is the one in which Pocahontas famously saved his life just before he was to be executed by Wahunsonacock. Because of the large role this story has come to play in American culture, it is hotly debated among scholars, largely because the story does not appear in Smith’s



English depiction of Wahunsonacock in full regalia. Detail from *Map of Virginia*, John Smith cartographer, William Hole, engraver. London, 1624. From Library of Congress, *Maps Collections*. <http://www.loc.gov/item/99446115/>

earlier, in country accounts of his meeting with Wahunsonacock. Helen Rountree argues that the salvation story is likely apocryphal. She points out that the kind of execution Smith was allegedly about to receive before Pocahontas stepped in was usually meted out only to criminals, not visiting dignitaries. Furthermore, Wahunsonacock's sudden change of heart regarding Smith, Pocahontas' young age and the low regard with which young girls were held in Powhatan politics suggests the story was a literary conceit used by Smith. While Rountree is certainly correct that Smith misinterpreted what he saw, Frederick Gleach points out that Smith was not lying outright. More likely, Smith was a participant in a ceremony in which he was "killed" ritualistically before being adopted as a new Werowance and a Powhatan. It is important to note that most of Smith's observations recorded prior to 1622 have been borne out with archaeological and ethnohistorical research. In short, while Pocahontas likely did not literally "save" John Smith, a ritual probably took place in which it appeared that way to Smith. Rountree, *Pocahontas's People: The Powhatan Indians of Virginia through Four Centuries*, 38-39. Gleach, *Powhatan's World and Colonial Virginia: A Conflict of Cultures*, 116-22. For further digression on Pocahontas' possible role in Smith's salvation, see: Robert S. Tilton, *Pocahontas: The Evolution of an American Narrative* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994). and J. A. Leo Lemay, *Did Pocahontas Save Captain John Smith?* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1992).

In their talks, Wahunsonacock was careful to let Smith know that he would see to revenging the death of Captain Newport's son, and that Smith should stay away from the Monacans and other groups outside his dominions as some "did eate men."⁶² This admonition came up again and again in negotiations with the English from 1607-1610. The English repeatedly offered to go campaigning on behalf of the Powhatans against their many traditional enemies, an offer that Wahunsonacock always rebuffed or deferred. While the paramount chief was eager to trade and receive English guns, he consistently resisted their offers to go beyond his borders and engage the Powhatans' enemies.

Historians often note that one of the reasons Wahunsonacock wished to maintain a relationship with the English was because they would be useful allies in his military struggles with indigenous rivals.⁶³ While the power of English weapons and trade goods would certainly have been obvious to Wahunsonacock and his subordinates, there is little evidence that they wanted the English to fight alongside them. Instead, the Powhatans wanted to acquire English weapons for their own use – military alliance was less the goal in Powhatan-English negotiations than acquiring military materials. Indeed, in early negotiations, Christopher Newport offered several times to help the Powhatans in their military struggles and was rebuffed. While Wahunsonacock often seemed pleased at the offer of English military assistance, he never

⁶² Smith, "A True Relation [1608]," 55.

⁶³ Axtell, *The Rise and Fall of the Powhatan Empire: Indians in Seventeenth-Century Virginia*, 13; Cave, *Lethal Encounters: Englishmen and Indians in Colonial Virginia*, 37; Rountree, *Pocahontas's People: The Powhatan Indians of Virginia through Four Centuries*, 43.

actually requested or employed it because to do so would reveal his military plans to the untrustworthy English.

Wahunsonacock invited Smith to re-locate to Capahowasicke in the heart of Tsenacommacah hoping to eliminate any chance of the English exploring and trading with his enemies. The Powhatan leader knew the English were starving, and he offered to feed them lavishly in exchange for copper and guns. The offer was more than an economic exchange of goods for land. Wahunsonacock sought to incorporate the English into Tsenacommacah in an official and long-lasting way by moving them to the heart of his domain, much as he had done with other recently conquered peoples such as the Kecoughtans. Smith accepted the Powhatan's offer and the mamanatowick gave him a new name befitting a werowance in Tsenacommacah, Nantaquoud.⁶⁴

Smith returned with Captain Newport to Werowocomoco in February of 1608, at which time the English offered again to attack the Monacans. This time, Wahunsonacock engaged in a long discourse about exactly how such an attack should be carried out and the spoils divided, but in the end deferred the English offer saying that "first he would send his spies, perfectly to understand their [the Monacans] strength and ability to fight with which he would acquaint us himself."⁶⁵ Later, as tensions between the two peoples rose and the English continued to use an attack on the Monacans as a bargaining chip, Wahunsonacock responded sharply, "as for the Monacans, I can revenge my owne injuries."⁶⁶ The paramount chief's resistance reveals his goals

⁶⁴ Smith, "A True Relation [1608]," 57; "The Generall Historie of Virginia, New-England, and the Summer Isles," 151.

⁶⁵ "A True Relation [1608]," 75.

⁶⁶ "The Proceedings of the English Colonie in Virginia, [1606-1612]," 263.

with the English. While Wahunsonacock was very interested in obtaining English trade goods and guns to use against his indigenous rivals, he knew better than to introduce his new English trading partners to his enemies. Wahunsonacock tried to instill in the English a healthy fear of Tsenacommacah's enemies so that Smith and his men would be hesitant to travel and trade widely.

After his captivity, but before he left for Jamestown, Wahunsonacock met Smith again and made it clear that he would require more in tribute than the sheets of copper, hatchets and beads that Smith had been trading with the Kecoughtans and Chickahominies. The Powhatan leader wanted guns. Having witnessed the power of European firearms, Wahunsonacock must have realized that possession of guns could fundamentally alter his position relative to indigenous and European rivals.⁶⁷ The paramount chief told Smith to send two cannons and a grindstone back to Werowocomoco to confirm his status as a subordinate werowance in Tsenacommacah. Wahunsonacock went on to remind Smith again that the English were to relocate to Capahowasicke where Smith would be the werowance.⁶⁸

Smith arrived back in Jamestown from his captivity and adoption on January 1, 1608. Christopher Newport arrived with supplies from England the same night. Only a week after Smith and Newport returned, a fire consumed most of the buildings in Jamestown along with most of the supplies and food Smith had acquired from his fall and winter trading.⁶⁹ After the fire, the English were utterly dependent on the Powhatans for food, excepting some provisions onboard Newport's recently arrived ship, which the sailors sold to the colonists at exorbitant

⁶⁷ Horn, *A Land as God Made It: Jamestown and the Birth of America*, 70-71.

⁶⁸ Smith, "The Generall Historie of Virginia, New-England, and the Summer Isles," 151.

⁶⁹ Wingfield, "A Discourse of Virginia Per Edward Maria Wingfield," 196; Smith, "A True Relation [1608]," 61.

prices.⁷⁰ Wahunsonacock sent his new werowance “plenty of bread, fish, turkies, squirrels, deare, and other wild beasts,” though only half of the food was a gift, the other half was sold to the colonists.⁷¹ Along with food, Wahunsonacock sent entreaties to Smith to take-up his new country and come personally to Werowocomoco with Christopher Newport, whom Smith had described during his captivity as his father and the leader of all the English. Facing several more months of “extreame frost” without shelter or food, Newport made preparations at once to visit Werowocomoco.⁷²

Captain Newport and Wahunsonacock each had a similar plan; both sought to overawe the other by demonstrating their greatness and gaining the other’s assistance. John Smith vehemently disagreed with Newport’s strategy, arguing that exchanging presents put too much power into the hands of the Powhatans, who were quite familiar with that style of exchange. Smith argued for a more strictly economic exchange in which the English would trade their goods carefully, keeping them scarce and thus the prices they could command high.⁷³ After sending several token gifts, Newport set out with John Smith and 30 or 40 well-armed men for a diplomatic visit to Werowocomoco in February of 1608. Smith reported that Wahunsonacock “strained himself to the uttermost of his greatness to entertain us.”⁷⁴ Not to be outdone, Newport sent Smith ahead to make first contact as a kind of herald, a tactic that annoyed Wahunsonacock and forced the Powhatans to perform an elaborate welcoming ceremony twice. Along with

⁷⁰ "The Proceedings of the English Colonie in Virginia, [1606-1612]," 218; "The Generall Historie of Virginia, New-England, and the Summer Isles," 157.

⁷¹ "The Proceedings of the English Colonie in Virginia, [1606-1612]," 215; "A True Relation [1608]," 61.

⁷² "The Proceedings of the English Colonie in Virginia, [1606-1612]," 218.

⁷³ Smith was careful to note that he obtaining the same amount of corn with his famous hand full of blue beads that Newport got with 12 huge copper cooking pots. *Ibid.*, 217; "The Generall Historie of Virginia, New-England, and the Summer Isles," 156.

⁷⁴ "The Proceedings of the English Colonie in Virginia, [1606-1612]," 216.

Smith, Newport sent Wahunsonacock a red suit of clothes, complete with hat, and a white greyhound. While he received the gifts graciously, confirming the “perpetuall league and friendship” between Smith and himself, the Powhatan leader quickly got down to business, discussing what he hoped to gain from the English with his largesse. As immediately as was politic, he asked Smith why the English had not sent him the cannons and grindstone they had agreed to at their last meeting.⁷⁵ Smith shrewdly replied that he had offered four demi-culverins (each weighing around 4,000 pounds) to the Powhatan men who escorted him home from their last meeting, but that they had refused to take them back to Werowocomoco. Wahunsonacock laughed at Smith’s response, recognizing it for the evasion that it was and asked Smith to bring him some guns of “lesse burthen,” when he next returned. Wahunsonacock then reaffirmed Smith’s status as a Powhatan werowance within Tsenacommacah and sent the Captain and his retainer back to Newport, each loaded with as much bread as they could carry.⁷⁶

The next day, preceded by a trumpeter, Captain Newport himself came ashore to meet Wahunsonacock. The long-awaited meeting lasted several days, though the anxious English returned each night to their ship to sleep and refused to disarm when in the presence of the paramount chief. Between lavish feasts and merrymaking, the two sides engaged in serious trading. The English needed to obtain enough corn to help alleviate the burnt stores at Jamestown and Wahunsonacock wanted guns, but settled for accumulating copper and hatchets while he made his case for more sophisticated English weapons.⁷⁷

⁷⁵ "A True Relation [1608]," 65.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 65-66.

⁷⁷ "A Map of Virginia [1612]," 71.

The English left Werowocomoco in early March 1608. A few days later, Wahunsonacock sent a gift of 20 turkeys to Captain Newport for which Newport sent the Powhatan leader 20 swords. For Smith, who was already annoyed at Newport's "poor trading," this gift of weapons was especially outrageous. Smith believed that in trading so liberally with Wahunsonacock, Newport had undercut the close-trading, no-nonsense reputation Smith had worked so hard to build with the Indians. After Newport left for England in April of 1608, Wahunsonacock sent Smith another gift of 20 turkeys, to which Smith did not remit swords or any other payment in an effort to correct the perceived trade imbalance.⁷⁸ Smith saw relations with the Powhatans as adversarial. If the Powhatans were satisfied with a trade, then the English must have been getting a bad deal.⁷⁹

In the months that followed Newport and Smith's trip to Werowocomoco, Powhatan continued to feed the English in Jamestown. They were so well supplied that Newport felt confident returning to England in April of 1608 having "set the clock in a true course." Newport was accompanied by Namontack, Wahunsonacock's "son," and several barrels of "gilded durt" that turned out not to contain gold.⁸⁰ In Jamestown, Smith put the men to work rebuilding their burnt down settlement and began training for future explorations. Tensions increased from Smith's military exercises and his failure to re-locate to Capahowasicke or to send Wahunsonacock the two cannons he had requested. Wahunsonacock began to pressure the English into meeting their obligations as client chiefdom within Tsenacommacah. He sent an

⁷⁸ "A True Relation [1608]," 79; "The Proceedings of the English Colonie in Virginia, [1606-1612]," 220-21.

⁷⁹ John Smith, Karen Ordahl Kupperman, and Institute of Early American History and Culture (Williamsburg Va.), *Captain John Smith : A Select Edition of His Writings* (Chapel Hill: Published for the Institute of Early American History and Culture by the University of North Carolina Press, 1988), 8.

⁸⁰ Wingfield, "A Discourse of Virginia Per Edward Maria Wingfield," 197.

English boy who had been left with him back to Jamestown to inquire whether the English military exercises were intended to prepare for an attack on the Powhatans. The Powhatan leader must have doubted the English would ever act as a proper district of Tsenacommacah when Smith replied to his inquiry with the obvious lie that the English military exercises were carried out in search of stones suitable for making hatchets.⁸¹

Provocative Explorations

By May of 1608, the English were clearly meeting Wahunsonacock's requests for guns and re-location with provocative military preparations. In response, the paramount chief gave instructions for Powhatans to begin stealing the guns and tools he had been promised.⁸² Powhatan thievery of tools became so brazen that Smith resolved to stop the problem by capturing and torturing thieves. After capturing 10 Powhatan men found within the walls of Jamestown, Smith threatened the men with death if they did not return the stolen tools. Threatened with torture and possible death, Macanoe, a Paspahighs elite, confessed that Wahunsonacock ordered he and his compatriots to steal whatever they could from the English. He also divulged that Wahunsonacock planned to ambush Captain Newport upon his return from England.⁸³ The situation quickly escalated when Powhatans took two English soldiers hostage. Finally, the Powhatan leader sent Rawhunt, a man of "subtll wit and crafty understanding" along with one of his daughters, Pocahontas, and a gift of food to Jamestown to negotiate the captive's release.⁸⁴ Rawhunt tried to re-assure Smith of Wahunsonacock's love and respect and

⁸¹ Smith, "A True Relation [1608]," 91.

⁸² "The Generall Historie of Virginia, New-England, and the Summer Isles," 159-60.

⁸³ "A True Relation [1608]," 89-93.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 94-95.

made sure Smith appreciated the symbolism of the paramount chief's sending his "most esteemed" daughter to Jamestown. Wahunsonacock's personal intervention seems to have delayed the rapidly decaying relations between the two groups in the late spring of 1608, but English provocations in the summer and fall quickly brought the situation again to a head.

Undeterred by Wahunsonacock's urging him to remain within the boundaries of Tsenacommacah and hoping to make a name for himself as an English explorer, John Smith spent the majority of 1608 reconnoitering the Chesapeake Bay and trading with many of the Powhatan's enemies. In June-July of 1608, Smith led a small expedition to the upper Chesapeake Bay and made contact with peoples along the Potomac River. Some of the chiefdoms Smith encountered near the mouth of the river were part of Tsenacommacah and were thus initially hostile, refusing to trade at Wahunsonacock's insistence. Further up the Potomac, the English traded with, and entertained warmly by the Noacotchtanks and Tauxenents, two groups outside Tsenacommacah and precisely the kind of people Wahunsonacock was trying to keep the English away from.⁸⁵

After being forced to return to Jamestown by a stingray barb to the arm that almost killed him, Smith led another expedition from late July to early September, this time even farther north to the Rappahannock River.⁸⁶ Soon after setting out, Smith's party encountered a group of seven or eight birch-bark canoes of hostile Massawomecks, the dreaded Iroquoian-speaking enemies of

⁸⁵ "The Proceedings of the English Colonie in Virginia, [1606-1612]," 227. Smith suggests the Potomacs attacked because some English runaways or "discontents" counselled Wahunsonacock to attack Smith. It is more likely that Wahunsonacock had his own reasons for attacking Smith, as noted above.

⁸⁶ After his recovery, Smith ate the offending ray much to the delight of his comrades. *Ibid.*, 228-33; "The Generall Historie of Virginia, New-England, and the Summer Isles," 172.

the Powhatans.⁸⁷ After some elaborate bluffing, Smith managed to trade with the Massawomecks who turned out to be a raiding party attacking nearby Tockwogh (now Sassafras) River peoples on the Eastern Shore. Later while among those Tockwogh peoples, Smith's party discovered "hatchets, knives, and peeces of yron and brasse," which they learned the Tockwogh's received in trade from the Susquehannocks, who in turn acquired them from their enemies the Massawomecks, who in turn obtained them from French traders in Canada.⁸⁸ Helen Rountree suggests the possession of these metal weapons and tools was what made the Powhatans so afraid of the Massawomecks.⁸⁹ If Wahunsonacock knew that his enemies possessed metal weapons obtained from European trade, it helps explain why he tolerated English insults for so long. Keeping the English and their trade goods, particularly guns, in Tsenacommacah was less dangerous than allowing them to leave and form trading relationships with the enemies of Tsenacommacah. However, by continuing to explore and make contact with Wahunsonacock's enemies, the English were quickly making themselves more dangerous than useful.

After his encounter with the Tockwogh and Susquehannocks, Smith pushed farther north to the Rappahannock River, where he managed to awe the initially hostile Rappahannocks and bring them to the bargaining table. In trading with the Rappahannocks, Smith did so well that the werowance "promised to plant Corne purposely for us [the English]; and we to provide hatchets, beats, and copper for them."⁹⁰ The Rappahannock deal was very similar to the one the Powhatan leader offered. Thus, to Wahunsonacock it must have looked like betrayal. The Rappahannocks

⁸⁷ Smith describes the Massawomecks as the Powhatans "most mortall enimies." "A Map of Virginia [1612]," 165-66.

⁸⁸ "The Proceedings of the English Colonie in Virginia, [1606-1612]," 231-32.

⁸⁹ Rountree, *Pocahontas's People: The Powhatan Indians of Virginia through Four Centuries*, 45.

⁹⁰ Smith, "The Generall Historie of Virginia, New-England, and the Summer Isles," 178; "The Proceedings of the English Colonie in Virginia, [1606-1612]," 232.

were on the utmost fringes of Tsenacommacah, and English offers of trade would likely push them out of the Powhatan chief's sphere of influence. By defying Wahunsonacock's wishes to relocate and stop exploring, and by openly trading with his enemies, Smith acted less like a new werowance and more like an enemy, forcing the paramount chief to change how he dealt with the English. In exploring the Chesapeake Bay, John Smith pushed Wahunsonacock too far. By making contact with Tsenacommacah's enemies, particularly those who already benefitted from other European trading partners farther north, Smith had proven himself not just a wayward werowance who refused to re-locate or trade weapons, but a potential ally to the enemies of Tsenacommacah. In the winter of 1608-1609, Wahunsonacock's allowance of English settlement in Virginia began to look more and more like a losing strategy.

In the fall of 1608, Captain Newport returned to Virginia with a plan. He, much like Smith the summer before, hoped to find a water passage across the continent and sought to follow up on rumors that the Monacans, enemies of the Powhatans living in the mountains to the West, knew a route across the mountains to the sea. Newport's plan was to awe Wahunsonacock into submission to the English crown and lure the Powhatans into guiding him to the Monacans by offering English help in a raiding expedition. Unfortunately for Newport, Smith's explorations around the Chesapeake Bay during the summer left Wahunsonacock increasingly suspicious of his new district of Englishmen. The Powhatan leader knew what the English wanted, and he knew they might ally with his Monacan enemies. When Christopher Newport sent John Smith to invite Wahunsonacock to Jamestown to receive presents and hear Newport's request for guides to the Monacans, the paramount chief shrewdly rejected the offer. Instead, Wahunsonacock turned what was intended to be a ceremony that established him as a vassal of

King James into a tribute ceremony, reestablishing his primacy over the English to the rest of Tsenacommacah.⁹¹

The last temptation of John Smith

When Captain Smith arrived in Werowocomoco to invite Wahunsonacock to Jamestown, he was informed that the paramount chief was away but would return soon. In his absence, Smith was entertained by a spectacle which may have been a last-ditch effort by Wahunsonacock to win Smith back as a loyal werowance of Tsenacommacah. Thirty naked young women, each painted a different color and each wearing a pair of stags horns on her head, staged an elaborate “maskarado,” wherein the women, “cast themselves in a ring about the fire, singing, and dauncing with excellent ill varietie, oft falling into their infernall passions and then solmnely againe to sing, and daunce.”⁹² When their dance concluded, the women invited Smith to their lodging. Following them inside, the “nimphes,” “more tormented [Smith] than ever, with crowding and pressing, and hanging upon him, most tediously crying, love you not mee?”⁹³ Smith remained silent on his response to the question. Instead, his account jumps politely from the subject of sex to a description of the food offered at the feast the night before he was directed to his lodging for the evening. When Smith recounted the story of the “Virginia Masque” in 1624, Smith inserted that Pocahontas was present at the proceedings, though he does not mention her taking part in the dance.⁹⁴

⁹¹ "The Proceedings of the English Colonie in Virginia, [1606-1612]," 233-35.

⁹² Ibid., 236.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ "The Generall Historie of Virginia, New-England, and the Summer Isles," 182-83.

Dancing was almost always a part of Powhatan reception ceremonies, but this kind of overtly sexualized dancing is unique in the English records; and it provokes a great deal of debate. Alden Vaughn and others assert that Pocahontas herself led the dance and that Smith and his retainers took the young women up on their offer, though Smith explicitly denies his participation.⁹⁵ Paula Gunn Allen compellingly argues that the women were part of a ceremony in which they represented different spiritual beings and Smith was invited to have sex with them in an effort to forge a connection between Smith and the spiritual power of the Powhatans.⁹⁶ While Allen may be correct about the purpose of the “maskarado” ritual generally, it is interesting that the ceremony seemed to be performed personally for John Smith. Given Smith’s unique position as an adopted werowance and his wayward actions the previous summer, the dance ceremony seems to have been designed to lure Smith back into the fold with both a carnal temptation and a re-forging of spiritual bonds. By resisting the young women’s sexual advances, and thus their spiritual ties, Smith confirmed for Wahunsonacock that he did not understand what it meant to be werowance in Tsenacommacah, and that he could no longer be trusted.

The morning after the maskarado, Wahunsonacock arrived back at his capital and met with Smith. Smith tried to convince the mamanatowick to return with him to Jamestown to receive presents from King James’s supposed plenipotentiary, Captain Newport. Wahunsonacock refused: “Your father (Newport) is to come to me, not I to him, nor yet to your fort, neither will I bite at such a baite: as for the Monacans, I can revenge my owne injuries... for any salt water beyond the mountains, the relations you have had from my people are false.” The

⁹⁵ Vaughn, *Transatlantic Encounters: American Indians in Britain, 1500-1776*, 79-80, 287 note 8; Karen Robertson, “Pocahontas at the Masque,” *Signs* 21, no. 3 (1996): 578-79.

⁹⁶ Paula Gunn Allen, *Pocahontas: Medicine Woman, Spy, Entrepreneur, Diplomat* (New York: Harper Collins, 2003), 89.

Powhatan leader's refusal revealed that he knew more about English plans than they supposed.⁹⁷ Confronted with this defiance, Newport acquiesced and presented Wahunsonacock with several presents, notably a red suit of clothes and a crown. Whatever the English hoped the ceremony conveyed about allegiance to James I, for the Powhatan leader it was a prestige booster. Foreign dignitaries came to him and presented gifts, and all he gave in return were his old cloak and shoes.⁹⁸

Because his coronation scheme did not yield the Powhatan support he had hoped for his Monacan expedition, Newport was forced to explore inland with no guide. Wahunsonacock was not eager to help the English make contact with his enemies and gave orders that his werowances should not trade with or feed the English along the way to the Monacans. It was the same strategy Wahunsonacock used against Smith and his men when they explored the bay the previous summer. Ill-supplied, the English expedition made it only a few days journey beyond the falls before they turned back. When they reached the falls, the Powhatans there feigned that "there were diverse ships come into the Bay to kill them at James Towne. Trade they would not, and find their corn we could not, for they had hid it in the woods."⁹⁹ The Powhatan strategy seemed to be moving from neglecting to help the English explore to actively conspiring to keep them in Jamestown.

By the winter of 1608-1609, Wahunsonacock attempted to stop all trade with the English. Smith tried several times to trade for supplies with the chiefdoms surrounding Jamestown, but

⁹⁷ Smith, "The Proceedings of the English Colonie in Virginia, [1606-1612]," 236.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 236-37; Horn, *A Land as God Made It: Jamestown and the Birth of America*, 107.

⁹⁹ Smith, "The Proceedings of the English Colonie in Virginia, [1606-1612]," 238.

was repeatedly rebuffed with “much scorne and insolence.”¹⁰⁰ In December, Christopher Newport returned to England for supplies, leaving Smith in charge of about 200 colonists who were once again on the verge of starvation and surrounded by Powhatans who refused to trade. While Smith was sometimes able to force trade by threatening violence, Wahunsonacock’s embargo against the English was generally enforced by his werowances.¹⁰¹ When confronted by hungry Englishmen, Powhatan werowances blamed a bad harvest for their refusal to trade.¹⁰² While the Chesapeake was indeed in a drought from 1606-1612, the werowances’ refusal to trade had more to do with orders from Wahunsonacock than with climate conditions.¹⁰³

English demands for food were certainly burdensome, offensive, and provocative, but at least in the winter of 1608-1609, Wahunsonacock’s refusal to feed the English likely had more to do with his policy of trying to bend the English to his will than with his inability to provide. Perhaps because they realized the power of Smith’s gunboat diplomacy, some of the nearby Powhatan chiefdoms began to withdraw altogether when the English arrived to trade. Wahunsonacock knew the English were dependent on Native corn, and he knew that whatever influence he held over his people, English guns could force their compliance. By having his people avoid the English altogether, he could prevent the English from using their firepower advantage and force the foreigners to come to him directly for food. His plan worked, and

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 239.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 242.

¹⁰² Rountree, *Pocahontas's People: The Powhatan Indians of Virginia through Four Centuries*, 48; Cave, *Lethal Encounters: Englishmen and Indians in Colonial Virginia*, 69; Rountree, *Pocahontas, Powhatan, Opechancanough: Three Indian Lives Changed by Jamestown*, 15.

¹⁰³ Tree-ring analysis suggests the Chesapeake was experiencing some of its driest weather in 700 years from 1606-1612. David W. Stahle et al., "The Lost Colony and Jamestown Droughts," *Science* 280, no. 5363 (1998).

Wahunsonacock was able to force the English to come hat-in-hand seeking provision in the winter of 1608-9.

Facing Powhatan refusals to trade and potential abandonment, Captain Smith was forced to accept when Wahunsonacock summoned him to Werowocomoco for the last time. When the English arrived in the Powhatan capital on January 12, 1609, Wahunsonacock believed he held all the cards. In a show of disdain, he greeted the English skeptically, remarking that he had not sent for them and questioning when they planned to leave. The weather forced the English to approach Werowocomoco wading through half a mile of frozen mud on the riverbank.

Wahunsonacock sent no porters to help them along as he had in earlier visits.¹⁰⁴ Though he had initially lured the English by sending word that he would trade food for a litany of goods including copper, beads, guns, cannon, a grindstone, swords and an English-style house, when Smith arrived, Wahunsonacock changed the deal. Looking over the English goods, the *mamanatowick* made it clear that he was no longer interested in copper or beads; he wanted weapons – those were the only English goods valuable enough to trade for food, the only goods worth risking a continued English presence in his domain. Recognizing the English predicament, Wahunsonacock reminded Smith that he “could eat his corn, but not his copper.”¹⁰⁵

Throughout the 13th of January, Smith and Wahunsonacock discussed how they had each been wronged by the other. The paramount chief reminded Smith again of his obligation as a *werowance* in Tsenacommacah and of the likelihood that the English would starve without Powhatan assistance:

¹⁰⁴ Smith, "The Proceedings of the English Colonie in Virginia, [1606-1612]," 245.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 242-43, 45-46.

What will it avail you, to take that perforce, you may quietly have with love, or to destroy them that provide you with food? What can you get by war, when we can hide our provision and flie to the woodes, whereby you must famish by wronging us your friends.¹⁰⁶

Smith responded by pointing out that he could seize food if it became necessary, and that even if the Powhatans hid, the English had resources they did not know about, “we have a rule to find [sustenance] beyond your knowledge.”¹⁰⁷ In the midst of their exchange, Smith became convinced that Wahunsonacock was merely biding his time until he found a convenient way to kill him. When the Powhatan mamanatowick finally excused himself from the proceedings, he was replaced by an alarming number of warriors. Smith had all the proof he needed that an attack was imminent. The rest of the day was spent in anxious delaying tactics: Smith and his English retainer waiting until their ship could get through the ice to rescue them and perhaps hold Wahunsonacock hostage and the Powhatans trying to convince Smith that there was nothing to be concerned about while they plotted an attack. The anxious day ended after eating supper, when the English were able to slip away without openly admitting that they suspected or intended an attack.¹⁰⁸

Wahunsonacock had made his position clear: without guns there would be no deals. Smith barely escaped Werowocomoco with his life, but he still had to find provisions for the colonists at Jamestown. With nowhere else to turn, he pointed his ship north to Pamunkey, the district of Tsenacommacah ruled by Wahunsonacock’s brother Opechancanough. Opechancanough and Smith had established a kind of rapport when the werowance captured Smith the previous winter and the Pamunkeys had provided food to English traders in the past.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 247.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 248.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 249-50.

Even so, Opechancanough, unsurprisingly, was not prepared to betray his brother and chief to keep the English alive. Though he welcomed the English with a feast and promised to provide food for trade, Opechancanough's hospitality was a ruse designed to keep the English off their guard until some 600-700 warriors could surround the English envoy sitting inside a house in the Pamunkey village of Cinquoteck. Faced with imminent death, Smith managed to grab Opechancanough by the hair and held him at gunpoint while he harangued the assembled Pamunkey warriors with an offer to trade copper for food "as friends" or else load his barge with "dead carcases."¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 251-53.



Robert Vaughn's engraving of John Smith taking Opechancanough prisoner, based on a 1590 engraving by Theodore De Bry and a 1585-1586 watercolor by John White, from John Smith's *Generall Historie* (1632 Edition), Colonial Williamsburg Foundation

For Opechancanough, the assault was a shocking affront. Ordering his men to drop their weapons, Opechancanough had the English ship loaded with food for the last time. Smith's assault on Opechancanough is often cited as the event that began the first Anglo-Powhatan War, though it seems likely that Wahunsonacock had changed his mind about the English several months earlier. By holding Opechancanough at gunpoint, Smith not only utterly alienated the Powhatans, but he managed to sever his last trump card with his English rivals. His relationship with the Powhatan leader was the one thing that gave him an advantage over his English rivals in Jamestown. His special relationship voided, he was no longer particularly useful to the English. For Wahunsonacock, the tense standoff at Werowocomoco pared with the attack on Opechancanough spelled the end of friendly relations with the English. Previous orders to attack the English only if they strayed too far from their home camp changed, and the Paspahighs who had owned the land where Jamestown stood began to attack the English whenever they strayed from their town.¹¹⁰

Making good on his treat to remove himself from the reach of the English, Wahunsonacock abandoned his seat at Werowocomoco after the winter encounter with Smith for the town of Orapax near the Chickahominy River, much further away from Jamestown. Now only accessible by canoe, Wahunsonacock took with him any English hope for food or supplies from the Powhatans.

Wahunsonacock Victorious

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 260-61.

While Wahunsonacock removed himself and his corn to Orapax, his warriors kept up a guerilla-style attack on the English. Despite the increased violence and elimination of trade, Captain Smith refused to admit how much the situation had changed in Tsenacommacah. Powhatan military pressure, lack of food, and internal disputes over leadership left the colony in a precarious position by the spring of 1609. After his retreat, Wahunsonacock began to deal with the English like dangerously useful enemies instead of a wayward chiefdom within Tsenacommacah.

In an effort to reduce factional arguments and to make supplies last longer at Jamestown, Smith ordered two groups of colonists to re-locate away from Jamestown to locations where they might more easily feed themselves. In the spring of 1609, Captain Smith sent large groups of men to forage at the seashore and near the falls of the James River. However, according to Smith, the men were more likely to trade their tools and weapons with any Powhatans they happened upon than to work. Smith reported that the majority of the colonists wanted to sell “not only our kettles, howes, tooles, and Iron, nay swords, peeces [guns], and the very ordenance, and houses...for one basket or corne...they would have sold their soules.”¹¹¹ Clearly, Wahunsonacock’s plan was working. Without his largesse, the English were clamoring to give him the very goods Smith refused to trade.

The English outlook improved somewhat in mid-July, when an English ship, the *Mary and John* commanded by Samuel Argall arrived in Jamestown. Captain Argall found the colony in dire straits, “dispersed in the Savage townes, living upon their almes for an ounce of Copper a

¹¹¹ Ibid., 264.

day.”¹¹² He also brought news that a large fleet of nine ships loaded with provisions and 500 men set out from Plymouth in June and was on its way accompanied by a new governor, Thomas Gates. Unfortunately for Jamestown, a hurricane caught Gates’ fleet and dashed it against the Bermuda reefs late in July.¹¹³ In August, three of the nine ships arrived in Jamestown, but they did not contain many much-needed provisions or new leadership. Instead, the ships that arrived in July contained more English mouths to feed and some of John Smith’s old political enemies who were ready to challenge him.

Partly in response to the new arrivals, Smith implemented a more permanent relocation plan for the English. Smith sent 120 men north, led by Francis West, to live near the falls on the James River. At the same time, he sent 60 men, led by John Martin and George Percy, downriver to live on oysters near the mouth of the James and the still-friendly Nansemonds.¹¹⁴ The 60 men under Martin quickly alienated the Nansemonds by setting up their camp on an island that the Nansemonds considered sacred and refused to sell. Instead of setting up friendly relations, Martin “beate the salvages out of the Island burned their howses ransacked their Temples, took downe the Corpses of their dead kings from their Tombes and Caryed away their pearles Copper and bracelets wherewith they do decore their kings funeralles.”¹¹⁵ During a break from desecrating Powhatan graves, Martin accidentally murdered the son of the Nansemond’s chief whom he had taken hostage, thus losing his only bargaining chip with local leader.¹¹⁶ Instead of

¹¹² Gabriel Archer, "31 August 1609, Gabriel Archer, from Virginia, to an Unknown Friend," in *The Jamestown Voyages under the First Charter: 1606-1609*, ed. Philip L. Barbour (Cambridge: The Hakluyt Society, 1969 [1609]), 282.

¹¹³ This wreck of Gates’ fleet provided the inspiration for Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*, 1611.

¹¹⁴ Smith, "The Proceedings of the English Colonie in Virginia, [1606-1612]," 269.

¹¹⁵ Mark Nicholls, "George Percy's "Trewe Relacyon": A Primary Source for the Jamestown Settlement," *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 113, no. 3 (2005): 244-45.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 245; Horn, *A Land as God Made It: Jamestown and the Birth of America*, 165-66.

becoming a self-sufficient settlement, the Englishmen at Nansemond quickly became a besieged outpost surrounded by outraged Nansemonds. Martin quickly abandoned his post and men for the relative safety of Jamestown. In the meantime, angry Nansemonds killed over half the men and seventeen of the survivors abandoned their post to seek asylum among the Kecoughtan. The English never heard from them again.¹¹⁷

The men Captain Smith sent up the river under Francis West also sparked bloodshed. West and his men established a palisade near the falls on the James River. When Smith visited the site a few weeks later he insisted that the fort was too close to the river and ordered its re-location to a position further inland. Specifically, they should move to the town of Powhatan (not to be confused with the man) within Wahunsonacock's son Parahunt's territory. Smith asserted that he had recently acquired the town from Parahunt in exchange for a promise of military alliance against the Monacans, though the details of the arrangement are vague. The sources are divided on what happened next. On one hand, Smith reported that West and his men were so hostile to his order to relocate that Smith was forced to flee for his life. On the other hand, George Percy and Henry Spelman recorded that Smith's re-location plan was part of a scheme to deliver the English under West into the hands of the paramount chief's son, Parahunt, and thereby removing any doubt in the mind of Wahunsonacock of Smith's loyalty.¹¹⁸ Both versions of why the English were dispersed to live among the Indians are problematic, designed more to place blame for the failure of the English settlement than to accurately portray what happened. It seems unlikely that Smith plotted with the Powhatans to betray his countrymen, or that the

¹¹⁷ Smith, "The Proceedings of the English Colonie in Virginia, [1606-1612]," 269-70; Nicholls, "George Percy's 'Trewe Relacyon': A Primary Source for the Jamestown Settlement," 246-47.

¹¹⁸ "George Percy's 'Trewe Relacyon': A Primary Source for the Jamestown Settlement," 245; Spelman, "Relation of Virginia, 1609," 482-83.

Powhatans would trust him after his actions the previous winter. It also seems unlikely that Parahunt would have traded away an entire town for a promise of military alliance from so untrustworthy an ally. James Horn more convincingly argues that John Smith bargained with Parahunt to house West and the English in exchange for copper, something he had done in hard times before in order to demonstrate his skill in negotiating with the Indians and maintain his position as leader.¹¹⁹ When West refused to live at Powhatan as Parahunt's guest and instead built a defensive fort deep within Powhatan territory, it provided the spark that ignited the powder keg John Smith had been stoking for over a year with high-handed, violent demands from the Powhatans. In the months that followed, Powhatan archers reduced West's complement of 120 men by 50 and the survivors fled back to Jamestown.

Historian Frederick Fauz argues that Smith's sending two groups of men to live, unbidden, off the largess of the Nansemonds and Pamunkeys - two particularly aggressive groups - was the final insult that started the First Anglo-Powhatan War.¹²⁰ Daniel Richter and Alfred Cave agree, though they point out that Smith had already provoked a war when he acted as a violently defiant werowance demanding food and ignoring the customs of deferential reciprocity expected of him by Wahunsonacock.¹²¹ While the English certainly provoked a war through their actions, it is an oversimplification to suggest that the Powhatan paramount chief simply decided to kill the English outright after this insult. Wahunsonacock did not need to launch a large-scale attack in the summer of 1609 because by then it appeared that his policy towards the English had succeeded. The English outposts outside Jamestown were besieged or

¹¹⁹ Horn, *A Land as God Made It: Jamestown and the Birth of America*, 168-69.

¹²⁰ Fauz, "An 'Abundance of Blood Shed on Both Sides': England's First Indian War, 1609-1614," 22.

¹²¹ Cave, *Lethal Encounters : Englishmen and Indians in Colonial Virginia*, 71-72; Richter, "Tsenacommacah and the Atlantic World," 58.

abandoned, with the majority of the English contained in Jamestown. Many of the hungry rank-and-file colonists stuck in Jamestown were willing to surreptitiously trade English tools and weapons for food. Moreover, John Smith was leaving. While sleeping in a boat on a trip to try and settle the violence at the falls, someone lit a bag of gunpowder hanging from Smith's waist. The subsequent explosion tore the flesh from his thighs and possibly castrated him. While Smith called the explosion an "accident," it is clear he thought the culprits were jealous rivals newly arrived with Gates' fleet.¹²² Whatever the cause, Smith's wound was serious enough that he left Virginia by October of 1609.

John Smith recorded that his departure for England emboldened the Powhatans to begin attacks on the remaining English in earnest, "all revolted, and did murder and spoile all they could incounter."¹²³ While Smith's departure is sometimes cited as the beginning of the First Anglo-Powhatan War by historians, it seems clear that the conflict began several months prior. By marking the beginning of the war with his departure, Smith attempted to cast the blame for the war on his successors and political rivals. While Smith's attitude towards the Powhatans certainly did not prevent violence, his skepticism of the Powhatans' intentions were well-founded by the fall of 1609. Immediately after Smith's departure, a Captain Ratliffe took two ships and 50 men upriver in an attempt to replicate Smith's earlier successes at trading with the Powhatans. Wahunsonacock easily lured Ratliffe into a trap out of which only 16 survivors

¹²² Smith, "The Proceedings of the English Colonie in Virginia, [1606-1612]," 271-72.

¹²³ Ibid., 275.

escaped, not including Ratliffe.¹²⁴ The fate of Ratliffe suggests that Smith was not exaggerating when he described his narrow escape from Werowocomoco the pervious January.

Wahunsonacock kept up the constant guerilla warfare throughout the winter of 1608-1609, a period the English later referred to as the “starving time.” Out of provisions and afraid to venture outside the walls of Jamestown, the population of the settlement fell from about 500 to less than 60 by the time help arrived in the late spring. On May 21, 1610 Governor Gates, presumed dead since the previous July, arrived in the Chesapeake in two ships his men had constructed while shipwrecked on Bermuda. The new Governor, upon finding Jamestown besieged and starving, decided at once to abandon the project and sail for England, much to the delight of the Jamestown survivors. The remaining 60 colonists loaded themselves into three ships and headed out to sea. Before they cleared the James River, Gates and the survivors encountered the well-provisioned fleet of the newly appointed governor, Thomas West, the Baron De La Warr, arriving in Virginia. De La Warr forced the fleeing, unhappy refugees back to Jamestown, which luckily Gates had prevented from being burning down upon its abandonment.¹²⁵

During the winter and spring of 1610, Wahunsonacock kept up his assaults on Jamestown but never moved to eliminate the fort. When Thomas Gates arrived in May, he described the fort as a ruin excepting the blockhouse which “could not have preserved them now many days longer from the watching, subtle, and offended Indian, who it is most certain, knew all this their

¹²⁴ Nicholls, "George Percy's "Trewelacyon": A Primary Source for the Jamestown Settlement," 247-48; Smith, "The Proceedings of the English Colonie in Virginia, [1606-1612]," 275; "The Generall Historie of Virginia, New-England, and the Summer Isles," 232.

¹²⁵ "The Proceedings of the English Colonie in Virginia, [1606-1612]," 276-77.

weakness and forbore too timely to assault the fort or hazard themselves in a fruitless war on such whom they were assured in short time would of themselves perish.”¹²⁶ Wahunsonacock could have easily wiped out the starving Englishmen who remained in Jamestown in the spring of 1610, but he chose to wait. While Gates and most subsequent historians argue that Wahunsonacock’s failure to exterminate the English was because he was assured their death was imminent, he may have hesitated because he still hoped the English would come to him in contrition. As the next chapter outlines, the Powhatans continued to accept English runaways from Jamestown throughout 1610 and the starving time. Moreover, Wahunsonacock was certainly capable and willing to launch large-scale exterminatory attacks on his rivals (recall his attack on the Chesapeake before the English arrived).¹²⁷ The small-scale nature of the attacks on the English prior to the arrival of Governor De La Warr may indicate that they really were the actions of nearby Paspaheghs, not military expeditions organized by Wahunsonacock.

Governor De La Warr sent a messenger to Wahunsonacock in an attempt to negotiate an end to the hostility. De La Warr took a high-handed tone with the paramount chief, insisting that Indian attacks were to stop and reminding the paramount chief that in accepting Captain Newport’s copper crown in the fall of 1608 he had “vowed, not only friendship but homage... to the offices of dutie to his Majestie [James I].”¹²⁸ Wahunsonacock responded in kind, warning the

¹²⁶ Lord Delaware Thomas West, "Letter to the Virginia Company of London, 7 July 1610," in *Jamestown Narratives: Eyewitness Accounts of the Virginia Colony*, ed. Edward Wright Haile (Champlain: RoundHouse, 1998 [1610]), 457.

¹²⁷ Strachey, *The Historie of Travell into Virginia Britania* (1612), 104-05; Rountree, *Pocahontas's People: The Powhatan Indians of Virginia through Four Centuries*, 47.

¹²⁸ William Strachey, "A True Reportory of the Wrack and Redemption of Sir Thomas Gates, Knight, Upon and from the Islands of the Bermudas; His Coming to Virginia, and the Estate of That Colony Then, and after under the Government of the Lord La Warre. July 15, 1610," in *Jamestown Narratives: Eyewitness Accounts of the Virginia Colony*, ed. Edward Wright Haile (Champlain: Roundhouse, 1998 [1610]), 436; Horn, *A Land as God Made It: Jamestown and the Birth of America*, 184-85.

English not send any more messengers to him unless “they brought him a coach and three horses, for he had understood by the Indians which were in England how such was the state of great werowances and lords in England to ride and visit other great men.”¹²⁹ The Powhatan leader gave a further ultimatum that the English should “depart his country or confine ourselves to James Town only, without searching further up into [Wahunsonacock’s] land or rivers, or otherwise he could give in command to his people to kill us, and do unto us all the mischief which they at their pleasure could.”¹³⁰

Threats and violence from both sides escalated into sporadic fighting. De La Warr, fresh from the Irish campaigns, ran his colony as a military garrison. When the English captured a Paspahegh warrior harassing the fort, the governor had the man’s right hand struck off and returned the mangled man to Wahunsonacock with a message that any “savages as the [English] could by any means surprise should run the same course.”¹³¹ De La Warr continued that if Wahunsonacock would not trade food and return stolen goods and people, he would “fire all his neighbor cornfields, town, and villages, and that suddenly.”¹³² Governor De La Warr made good on his threats. After witnessing the “sacrifice” of one of their officers who was captured when his boat drifted too near the shore, an English expeditionary force lured some nearby Kecoughtans whom they felt were probably responsible into an ambush. After the attack killed some 14 people, the English were able to capture the Kecoughtan town, and more importantly its corn fields.¹³³ In the months that followed, the English would use a similar tactic again and again

¹²⁹ Strachey, "A True Reportory," 436-37.

¹³⁰ Ibid., 437.

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ The Ancient Planters of Virginia, "A Brief Declaration," in *Jamestown Narratives: Eyewitness Accounts of the Virginia Colony: The First Decade 1607-1617*, ed. Edward Wright Haile (Champlain, VA: Roundhouse, 2007), 898.

– a surprise attack followed by stealing food, burning crops and houses. Those closest to the English - the Kecoughtans, Paspaheghs, Chickahominies, and Warraskoyacks - suffered the worst depredations. De La Warr's aggressive tactics prevented the English from being held hostage within the walls of Jamestown again and supplemented the English stores while destroying the surrounding Powhatans' ability to feed themselves. The policy of surprise attack, often under the guise of friendship, did not work for long.

By the end of the summer, the Powhatans were responding in kind to English attacks. The werowansqua of an Appamatotoc town lured ashore an English expedition on a journey to re-garrison the abandoned fort at the falls with offers of a feasting and sex. Hidden Appamatotocs attacked as soon as the English came ashore and killed all except a drummer boy who made it back to the boat.¹³⁴ The escapee, Thomas Dowse, was the same boy whose music and dancing had lured the Kecoughtans into an English ambush earlier in the summer. The similarity of the attacks led George Percy to remark that the "Salvages be nott soe Simple as many Imagin who be not acquaynted w[i]th their Subtellties."¹³⁵ The Powhatans continued their guerilla tactics against the English and forced them from their reclaimed fort at the falls by the end of the winter. In March of 1611, De La Warr himself abandoned Virginia because of his ill health. Also in March, the Paspaheghs sent 500-600 bowmen to attack a small English fort protecting the entrance to Jamestown. The attack succeeded and the English defenders were wiped out in a hail of arrows. After their success, the Paspaheghs remained in the area shouting

¹³⁴ Strachey, *The Historie of Travell into Virginia Britania* (1612), 64.

¹³⁵ Nicholls, "George Percy's "Trewe Relacyon": A Primary Source for the Jamestown Settlement," 255-56.

in “tryumphe of their gayned victory” and chanting the name “Paspahegh,” until the English sent out a force of 50 armed men to recover the bodies.¹³⁶

Soon after the Paspahegh attack, Sir Thomas Dale arrived in Virginia to replace the ailing De La Warr. Dale continued De La Warr’s aggressive and militaristic tactics both in building discipline among the English and in using violence to extract food from nearby villages. Along with Dale came several hundred well-armed men and three ships full of provisions. Dale’s plan was to “leave him [Wahunsonacock] either no room in his country to harbor in or draw him to a firm association with ourselves.”¹³⁷ The English plan was very similar to Wahunsonacock’s plan for the English, except that while the paramount chief feared driving the English into alliance with his enemies, Dale did not mind forcing the Powhatans out of the Chesapeake plain.

Powhatan Resistance and the loss of Pocahontas

Throughout the 1611, Dale continued De La Warr’s policy of attacking nearby Indian towns followed by stealing food and burning crops.¹³⁸ By 1612, armored English units marching in formation torched the remaining Nansemond villages near the entrance to the James River, freeing up the lower James Valley for English expansion.¹³⁹ Unable to meet the increasing violence from Jamestown without suffering unacceptable losses, Powhatan attacks took on an increasingly supernatural disposition employing “sorceries and charmes.” Wahunsonacock’s

¹³⁶ Ibid., 258.

¹³⁷ Thomas Dale, "Letter to Salisbury, 17 August 1611," in *Jamestown Narratives: Eyewitness Accounts of the Virginia Colony*, ed. Edward Wright Haile (Champlain: Roundhouse, 1998 [1611]), 554.

¹³⁸ Fausz, "An 'Abundance of Blood Shed on Both Sides': England's First Indian War, 1609-1614," 42.

¹³⁹ Nicholls, "George Percy's 'Trewe Relacyon': A Primary Source for the Jamestown Settlement," 258-59.

greatest fear was still that the English would ally with his indigenous enemies. When he learned that the English were planning another voyage upriver to try once again to establish a fort at the falls and make contact with the Monacans, he sent messengers to Jamestown warning against such a move and threatening to destroy the expedition “after [a] strange manner” by “making us drunk and then kill us.”¹⁴⁰ While it is unclear what Wahunsonacock’s “strange manner” of attack may have involved, George Percy recorded an incident he believed qualified. While on their way upriver, Thomas Dale and his advisors spent the night in an Indian house. Suddenly, the whole company “imagined the Salvages were sett upon them, each man taking Takeinge one an other for an Indyan and so did fall pell mell one upon an other beateinge one an other Downe and breakeinge one of an others heades, thatt mutche mischiefe mighte have bene donn butt thatt it pleased god the fantasy was taken away whereby they had bene deluded and every man understood his errour.”¹⁴¹ While the ordinary anxiety of soldiers in a hostile land may explain the hysteria Percy describes, he suggested Powhatan spiritual warfare caused the fight.

Powhatan efforts were further emboldened by a charismatic new field commander, Nemattanew, also known as “Jack of the Feathers” because of the ostentatious costume he wore while leading daring raids against the English. Outfitted with swan’s wings “as thowghe he meante to flye,” Nemattanew never risked a frontal assault but led hit-and-run raids against the English as they constructed their new outpost Henrico.¹⁴² Despite the casualties inflicted under Nemattanew, the English policy of armored attack followed by burning villages and crops allowed the English to expand their presence. By the summer of 1611, Dale had managed to

¹⁴⁰ Alexander Rev. Whitaker, “Letter to the Reverent William Crashaw, 9 August 1611,” in *Jamestown Narratives: Eyewitness Accounts of the Virginia Colony*, ed. Edward Wright Haile (Champlain: Roundhouse, 1998 [1611]), 549.

¹⁴¹ Nicholls, “George Percy’s “Trewe Relacyon”: A Primary Source for the Jamestown Settlement,” 259.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, 261.

construct and garrison a substantial fort at the falls, effectively succeeding where his predecessors had failed and securing most of the James River valley for the English.¹⁴³

Even more alarming for the Powhatans was the news that an English expedition from Jamestown led by Captain Samuel Argall re-established relations with the Patawomecks and other Algonquian groups on the Potomac River in the northern fringes of Tsenacommacah. The Patawomecks were only recently added to the Tsenacommacah, and trade with the English provided them with an escape from Wahunsonacock's oversight. For the paramount chief, the defection of the Patawomecks was a serious problem. If the English, who depended on indigenous food supplies, allied with Wahunsonacock's rivals they could become an even more substantial threat, striking into the heart of Tsenacommacah. With this in mind, the Powhatan mamanatowick sent an envoy that included his daughter Pocahontas to the Patawomecks in an effort to ensure their commitment to him and remind them of the dangers of leaving Tsenacommacah. Unfortunately for Wahunsonacock, Captain Samuel Argall arrived on the Potomac while the Powhatan diplomats were among the Patawomecks in April of 1613. When Argall learned that Pocahontas was among the visitors, he arranged a deal with Iopassus, the werowance of a Patawomeck village, whereby he would kidnap Pocahontas and attempt to exchange her for some English hostages. Argall made his case to Iopassus by offering English military support should Wahunsonacock retaliate against the Patawomecks. After some discussion, the Patawomeck werowance agreed to Argall's plan and, with Iopassus' help, the English lured Pocahontas onto an English ship for a state dinner. Once aboard, Argall informed

¹⁴³ Ralph Hamor, *A True Discourse of the Present State of Virginia*, Virginia State Library Publications, No. 3 (Richmond, Virginia State Library, 1615; repr., 1957), 29-31; Nicholls, "George Percy's 'Trew Relacyon': A Primary Source for the Jamestown Settlement," 261.

Pocahontas she could not leave. Argall sent messengers to Wahunsonacock demanding food, the return of English prisoners, and the return of any stolen weapons in exchange for Pocahontas.¹⁴⁴

Wahunsonacock's response to the kidnapping of Pocahontas took some time in coming. According to Argall, her father responded almost immediately and met almost all of Argall's demands right away. However, according to Ralph Hamor, who had less to gain by portraying Pocahontas' kidnapping as a master-stroke of diplomacy, Wahunsonacock did not reply to the English demands for at least three months. When he did respond in April, the Powhatan leader offered some concessions of food and returning broken English muskets and runaway colonists in exchange for peace with the English. Despite Wahunsonacock's concessions, Dale refused to return Pocahontas, as he believed the mamanatowick was withholding serviceable weapons that he would not return. After Dale's refusal, the paramount chief sent no more messengers for an entire year.¹⁴⁵

An End to Fighting and Opechancanough Ascendant

In March of 1614, Samuel Argall mounted an expedition up the York River to find Wahunsonacock and force the exchange for Pocahontas that he had insisted on the previous year, or else "burn all."¹⁴⁶ When he reached Orpax, the Powhatans informed Dale that Wahunsonacock was away, but that Opechancanough, the paramount chief's brother, was authorized to treat with him. At their meeting, Opechancanough, surrounded by well-armed

¹⁴⁴ Samuel Argall, "Letter to Hawes, June 1613," in *Jamestown Narratives: Eyewitness Accounts of the Virginia Colony*, ed. Edward Wright Haile (Champlain: Roundhouse, 1998 [1613]), 754-55; Hamor, *A True Discourse of the Present State of Virginia*, 3-8; Rice, "Escape from Tsenacommacah: Chesapeake Algonquians and the Powhatan Menace," 98-99.

¹⁴⁵ Hamor, *A True Discourse of the Present State of Virginia*, 4-7; Argall, "Letter to Hawes, June 1613," 755.

¹⁴⁶ Thomas Dale, "To the R[Everned] and My Most Esteemed Friend, Mr. D.M. At His House at F. Ch. In London," *ibid.* (1998 [1615]), 843.

warriors, agreed almost too easily to all of Dale's demands. He did not insist on Pocahontas' return, agreeing instead to her marriage to the Englishman John Rolfe. He further agreed to return any runaway Englishmen and their weapons to the English and to provide corn for the English in the coming year. Dale believed Opechancanough capitulated both because he was intimidated and because it was April and he needed to end hostilities so his men could begin planting corn for the coming year.¹⁴⁷ Whatever his reasons, Opechancanough allayed English fears of a trap when he made good on his promises and delivered the confiscated weapons as agreed. For the English it seemed that harsh dealing had proved successful and that Opechancanough was a more reasonable leader than Wahunsonacock had been. Dale went so far as to remark that the Powhatans "strive with all alacritie to keepe us in good opinion of them; by which many benefits arise unto us."¹⁴⁸

Dale's meeting with Opechancanough also marked the first time the English became aware of a change in Powhatan leadership. After their meeting, Dale described Opechancanough as "their chiefe Captaine: and one that can as soon (if not sooner) as Powhatan command the men."¹⁴⁹ Hamor agreed that Opechancanough was "[Wahunsonacock's] successor, one who hath already the command of all the people."¹⁵⁰ By the time of Dale and Opechancanough's meeting, it seems Wahunsonacock's gambit had failed. His constituent chiefdoms along the James River were under near-constant attack, and his outlying provinces on the Eastern Shore and Potomac River were in open negotiations with the English. The paramount chief's plan to push the English into position as a sub-chiefdom of Tsenacommacah had failed, and his worst

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 844-45.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., 845.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., 843.

¹⁵⁰ Hamor, *A True Discourse of the Present State of Virginia*, 10.

fears about the English allying with his enemies were coming true. Historians often cite the kidnapping and later marriage of Pocahontas as the events that ended the First Powhatan War.¹⁵¹ From a Powhatan perspective, however, the kidnapping of Pocahontas was likely seen as the last in a long series of events that eroded Wahunsonacock's ability to lead in Tsenacommacah. The lull in fighting after 1614 likely had more to do with a transition in leadership and implementing the plans of the new Powhatan mamanatowick, Opechancanough, than with English success in capturing Pocahontas. By 1614, Wahunsonacock's authority was in question and Opechancanough was on the ascent in Tsenacommacah.¹⁵² English sources reported that Wahunsonacock was "in feare of" Opechancanough and that the authority and ability to command the Powhatans had already shifted to Opechancanough by 1616, although the old mamanatowick did not die until 1618.¹⁵³

With his authority waning, it seems Wahunsonacock still hoped to nudge the English into recognizing their obligations as a subservient chiefdom. When Pocahontas traveled to London in the spring of 1616, she encountered John Smith, whom the English told her died following his "accident" and swift departure in 1609. Upon seeing Smith, Pocahontas remained silent for several hours both upset at the lie of his death and at his failure to honor his obligations as a werowance. When she finally spoke it was to remind Smith of his relationship and the reciprocal obligations between himself and Wahunsonacock. Pocahontas reminded Smith that he "did promise Powhatan what was yours should be his, and he the like to you; you called him father being in his land a stranger, and by the same reason so must I doe you... I will be for ever and

¹⁵¹ Fausz, "An 'Abundance of Blood Shed on Both Sides': England's First Indian War, 1609-1614."

¹⁵² Rountree, "The Powhatans and the English: A Case of Multiple Conflicting Agendas," 184-85.

¹⁵³ *Pocahontas's People: The Powhatan Indians of Virginia through Four Centuries*, 62; Purchas, *Purchas His Pilgrims*, 19, 119.

ever your Countrieman.”¹⁵⁴ For Pocahontas at least, Smith’s survival meant that his obligations as a werowance of Tsenacommacah were still in force. His survival must have been quite a shock, especially considering the many years of bloodshed in Virginia that came after his removal to England.

While the English believed the war was over, what Dale touted as a success was merely a temporary, strategic cease-fire to allow for a change in Powhatan policy and leadership. After the negotiations with Opechancanough, Wahunsonacock only met with the English on one other occasion - when Ralph Hamor came to request his youngest daughter as a wife for Thomas Dale. Dale wanted to ensure the joining of the two groups as “one people” by marrying the “the exquisite perfection of your youngest daughter, being famous through all your territories.”¹⁵⁵ The Powhatan leader rejected the offer outright and argued that marrying off one daughter was “sufficient” to ensure the peace between their two peoples. Wahunsonacock ended the meeting by reassuring Hamor that he would not be the one to break the peace and that if the English turned violent again he would simply move farther away, and in so doing “end my daies in peace.”¹⁵⁶

Opechancanough did his best to seem like the kind of Indian leader the English wanted while simultaneously consolidating power within Tsenacommacah. To the English he seemed like a friend when he helped negotiate a peaceful resolution to a disagreement they had with the Chickahominies who refused to pay tribute to the English. The English did not know that in the

¹⁵⁴ Smith, “The Generall Historie of Virginia, New-England, and the Summer Isles,” 260-61; Townsend, *Pocahontas and the Powhatan Dilemma*, 156; Richter, *Facing East from Indian Country*, 76-77; Allen, *Pocahontas: Medicine Woman, Spy, Entrepreneur, Diplomat*, 292-94.

¹⁵⁵ Hamor, *A True Discourse of the Present State of Virginia*, 833.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 834-35.

process Opechancanough convinced the hold-out Chickahominies and their several-hundred warriors to join him as subordinate members of Tsenacommacah, something Wahunsonacock had never been able to do.¹⁵⁷ Winning the Chickahominies united the heart of the paramount chiefdom and consolidated the Powhatan heartland politically and militarily. The English were also pleased when Opechancanough came to meet the English on their turf and listened intently to sermons on his visits to English settlements, something Wahunsonacock had always considered beneath his dignity as a ruler. Further ingratiating himself, Opechancanough invited the English to spread-out and settle on any un-occupied land they could find, luring the English away from the safety of their forts. In late 1621, Opechancanough went so far as to send for Roger Thorpe, a minister, asking for a lecture on the superiority of English religion. The English did not know that by 1621, Uttamatomakin, a priest who had accompanied Pocahontas to England and been interviewed by English clergymen, had the ear of Opechancanough. Unimpressed by London, Uttamatomakin returned with fiercely anti-English attitudes that informed Opechancanough's actions.¹⁵⁸ A shrewd politician, Opechancanough managed to spin even Uttamatomakin's obvious disdain into something palatable to the English. Samuel Argall reported, Uttamatomakin "rails against England, English people and particularly his best friend Thomas Dale [but] all his reports are disproved before [Opechancanough] and his Great men whereupon (to the great satisfaction of the Great men) Uttamatomakin is disgraced."¹⁵⁹

In the peace of 1614-1622, the English presence in the James River valley continued to grow and to push out the indigenous peoples. Opechancanough's new policy of accommodation

¹⁵⁷ Fausz, "Opechancanough: Indian Resistance Leader," 29.

¹⁵⁸ Rountree, "The Powhatans and the English: A Case of Multiple Conflicting Agendas," 187.

¹⁵⁹ Samuel Argall, "A Letter, Probably to His Majesty's Council for Virginia: June 9, 1617," in *The Records of the Virginia Company of London*, ed. Susan Myra Kingsbury (Washington DC: Government Printing Office, 1933), 73.

won over the English leadership who believed that in Opechancanough they finally had someone with whom they could work. His accommodation seemingly bordering on the obsequious, Opechancanough was careful to cultivate this impression with the English. Having learned from the heavy losses the Powhatans suffered when fighting well-armed and armored English troops, Opechancanough knew he could not hope to oust the English with indigenous arms. Instead he sought to convince the English to lower their guard, come out of their forts, and expose themselves to his arrows. Domestically, Opechancanough was able to use the English threat to his advantage, winning over the displaced James River chiefdoms and the previously hostile Chickahominies. In some ways, it seems remarkable that the English were not more suspect of his motives. When an Englishman “accidentally” killed Opechancanough’s greatest warrior, the charismatic Nemattanew, in March of 1622, the outraged Opechancanough sent word merely that the death of “one man” was no cause for alarm and that “the skye should sooner falle than peace be broken.”¹⁶⁰ In fact, Nemattanew was at the heart of Opechancanough’s military revitalization plans for the Tsenacommacah. The elite warrior’s seeming invulnerability and daring raids endeared him to the other Powhatan warriors, making him an important part of Opechancanough’s plans. Moreover, Nemattanew was adept at using captured English weapons, a skill that was not easily replaced.¹⁶¹ That Opechancanough was able to swallow his rage at Nemattanew’s loss, demonstrates his incredible self-control. Certainly in 1621, and possibly since he eclipsed Wahunsonacock as *mamanatowick*, Opechancanough held his tongue while he planned his attack.

¹⁶⁰ Fausz, "The Powhatan Uprising of 1622 : A Historical Study of Ethnocentrism and Cultural Conflict," 341-57; Rountree, *Pocahontas's People: The Powhatan Indians of Virginia through Four Centuries*, 72-73.

¹⁶¹ Fausz, "Opechancanough: Indian Resistance Leader," 30.

Opechancanough's War

On March 22, 1622, only days after the death of Nemattanew, Opechancanough's warriors simultaneously struck at dozens of English settlements throughout the James River Valley, killing some 330 people or about one quarter of the English population in Virginia. The surprise attack of 1622 began what is often called the Second Anglo-Powhatan War, though the term "second" suggests a new conflict instead of the implementation of a new policy in an on-going conflict. Not that Opechancanough entirely refuted Wahunsonacock's policies towards the English. His attack in 1622 was not a revitalization movement based on removing the English and ushering in a return to an idealized past. Opechancanough was in the same difficult position as his brother. He wanted English weapons, but did not want the English to complicate his domestic politics by emboldening chiefdoms on the fringes of Tsenacommacah.¹⁶² However, unlike Wahunsonacock, Opechancanough appreciated that the greatest weakness of the English was their arrogance. In the peace from 1614-1622, Opechancanough carefully cultivated the English to perceive him as a subservient and trustworthy ally, but the ruse was all part of his plan to force the English either into submission or abandonment of Tsenacommacah.¹⁶³

Opechancanough's attack was designed not only to force the English into compliance or abandonment, but also to demonstrate the strength of Tsenacommacah to those fringe chiefdoms that were forming trading relationships with the English. In the weeks after the attack, Opechancanough sent word of the attack as well as gifts to the chief of the Patawomecks in an attempt to lure him back into the fold of Tsenacommacah. Opechancanough sent two baskets of

¹⁶² Hatfield, *Atlantic Virginia : Intercolonial Relations in the Seventeenth Century*, 19.

¹⁶³ Gleach, *Powhatan's World and Colonial Virginia : A Conflict of Cultures*, 158.

beads and asked the Patawomeck chief to reconsider his recent alliance with the English because “before the end of two Moones there should not be an Englishman in all the Countries.”¹⁶⁴ Many historians portray the attack of 1622 as part of a desperate attack by an indigenous leader who felt the culture of his people besieged by English missionaries.¹⁶⁵ On the contrary, Opechancanough’s actions suggest he was not a man concerned that his culture or religion were in danger from an outside force. In fact, he seemed supremely confident that his culture was superior to that of the English.

Opechancanough exploited English preoccupations with religion and culture to get what he wanted. For example, in exchange for allowing Christian instruction among his people, Opechancanough insisted on gifts of guns and training in their use. Moreover, Opechancanough insisted on *good* guns, not worn-out English cast-offs but modern, snaphance muskets that would prove effective against armored English soldiers.¹⁶⁶ By inviting religious instruction in exchange for weapons, Opechancanough demonstrated his confidence that the English way of life was so unappealing as to present no great lure to his people.

The English felt supremely betrayed by the attack, their patriarchal oversight had been met with violence. Abandoning the aim of missionizing and incorporating Indians as English citizens in the expanding colony, the English and Powhatans traded atrocities for the next ten years. These conflicts galvanized anti-Indian sentiment in Virginia for years to come. Because the attack of 1622 was a surprise, the English felt entirely justified in retaliating in near-

¹⁶⁴ Smith, "The Generall Historie of Virginia, New-England, and the Summer Isles," 308.

¹⁶⁵ Fausz, "The Powhatan Uprising of 1622 : A Historical Study of Ethnocentrism and Cultural Conflict," 6.

¹⁶⁶ Steele, *Warpaths: Invasions of North America*, 45.

genocidal force.¹⁶⁷ The two most important English sources regarding the 1622 attack are Edward Waterhouse's, *A Declaration of the state of the Colonie and Affaires in Virginia...* (1622) and John Smith's account of the attack in his *Generall History of Virginia...* (1624.) Waterhouse's account is based on his interviews with eyewitnesses and survivors of the attack. Smith's account adds details to Waterhouse's original work. The complete title of Waterhouse's account, *A Declaration of the state of the Colonie and Affaires in Virginia, With a Relation of the barbarous Massacre in the time of peace and League, treacherously executed by the Native Infadels upon the English, 22 March last*, reveals a great deal about English perceptions of the attack. After the attack, the stated purpose of the English became to "clean drive them [the Powhatans] from these parts."¹⁶⁸

In the end, Opechancanough's plan to bring the English to heel failed because he did not recognize that the English colony had changed, nor was he able to reincorporate those fringe chiefdoms that traded so enthusiastically with the English. Despite Opechancanough's attempt to lure them back, several chiefdoms on the fringe of Tsenacommacah kept up their trade with the English and kept the English fed during the war. Moreover, when Opechancanough attacked in 1622, he did not realize he was attacking a new kind of English overseas settlement; one that was based not on trade with Indians but on production. The introduction of Orinoco tobacco as well as the implementation of the headright system meant that the English colony was changing from a trading post into a land-hungry production center. As such, winning over the Virginia locals was less important than removing them from valuable tobacco-growing land. Opechancanough's

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., 47; Cave, *Lethal Encounters : Englishmen and Indians in Colonial Virginia*, xiii-xv.

¹⁶⁸ *Journals of the House of Burgesses, 1619-1658/59*, (Richmond 1915), 37; Waterhouse, "A Declaration of the State of the Colony in Virginia."

plan was based on the presumption that the English needed *someone* in Virginia to trade with. Unfortunately, by 1622 this presumption was outdated.

Conclusion

When examined from an English perspective, the early years of Powhatan-English contact were peppered with sporadic, seemingly random violence. That violence becomes both rational and precise when considered as a political tool wielded by an incipient indigenous paramouncy aware of its place on the fringes of an Atlantic World. James Axtell argues Powhatan's policy towards the English vacillated "between killing and kindness," trying to keep the English around, but not to let their numbers grow too large.¹⁶⁹ While Axtell's summary is correct, it is important to add that much of the Powhatans' "killing" was designed to keep the English away from Tsenacommacah's indigenous rivals and trading with Tsenacommacah according to Powhatan norms. While war is likely too strong a word for what was happening in Virginia from 1607-1614, the violence that is often labeled as the First Anglo-Powhatan War was really an attempt by Wahunsonacock to discipline and incorporate the unruly English as a district of Tsenacommacah.

In the first few years of English settlement in Tsenacommacah, however, Wahunsonacock's plan worked relatively well. The Powhatan leader could put pressure on the English by either providing or limiting trade in food. English leadership preferred to deal with a paramount chief instead of negotiating ad-hoc agreements with every werowance they encountered. English exploration around the Chesapeake led them into alliances with

¹⁶⁹ Axtell, *The Rise and Fall of the Powhatan Empire: Indians in Seventeenth-Century Virginia*, 13.

Wahunsonacock's indigenous rivals. These new relationships threatened the paramount chief's ability to direct the English and he turned to more violent means to correct the English and keep them in Jamestown. The difficult challenge for Wahunsonacock was to prevent the English from expanding their settlements and making contact and trade deals with indigenous rivals without completely exterminating the English settlement. This was the root of both the First Anglo-Powhatan War (August, 1609 - April, 1614) and the more well-known Second Anglo-Powhatan War (1622-1632). In both cases, the Powhatan leadership, first Wahunsonacock and then Opechancanough, were forced to balance their need for English good and weapons with the serious issues that arose from harboring the violent and demanding English colony squatting in Paspahegh territory. Wahunsonacock guerilla war was limited in scope, not because the Powhatans did not believe in full-scale war, or were unable to eliminate the small numbers of English, but because they wanted to discipline, not remove, the English living within Tsenacommacah.

Opechancanough's attack of 1622 is often cited as the opening salvo in a noble if violent campaign to preserve Powhatan culture and religion in danger from English cultural imperialism. However, the so-called Second Anglo-Powhatan War was more a continuation of the First Anglo-Powhatan War with the same economic and political roots. By suggesting that the violence of 1622 was different, historians give too much credit to the influence of English colonial culture on the chiefdoms of Tsenacommacah. English goods, particularly guns, proved an impossible diplomatic problem for Wahunsonacock and Opechancanough, who could neither tolerate the English as an unruly district within Tsenacommacah, nor risk driving the English away to trade with their enemies.

Chapter 5

Disaffected Dutchmen: What English Runaways Reveal about Tsenacommacah

Edmund Morgan sums up the tragedy of early Virginia by noting that “most of the settlers who ventured their lives lost them. And so did most of the Indians who came near them.”¹ Indeed, the vast majority of English colonists who arrived in Tsenacommacah between 1607 and 1632 were killed by a combination of disease, starvation, exposure and despair.² For those who survived the “seasoning,” the threat of death by the Algonquian-arrow loomed large. Despite their fear, many English colonists could not help but notice that their indigenous neighbors, peoples of the Chesapeake coastal-plain, seemed to live in relative comfort and plenty. English colonials had several reactions to this inequality in living conditions. While most of the English leadership sought to claim Indian food and resources by force or trade, several non-elite colonists sought to live permanently among their new neighbors. Because that alternative reflected poorly on the colonial leadership, the colonists who refused to return from temporary Indian hosts, or who ran away to live with the Indians permanently, seldom made their way into the colonial records penned by their superiors. Even so, the few examples of runaway colonists that survive reveal something about how the Powhatan leadership thought

¹ Morgan, *American Slavery, American Freedom : The Ordeal of Colonial Virginia*, 48.

² Alongside the well-documented problem of starvation, Karen Kupperman points out that the psychological effects of living far from home with no clear purpose compounded the death rate in Jamestown. This psychological problem, as Edmund S. Morgan points out, cleared up when the profitability of Tobacco helped give English colonists a purpose in Virginia. Carville Earle points out that the location of Jamestown on near the estuary zone of the James River made it an especially un-healthy place to set up a permanent settlement. Karen Ordahl Kupperman, "Apathy and Death in Early Jamestown," *The Journal of American History* 66, no. 1 (1979): 25; Edmund S. Morgan, "The Labor Problem at Jamestown, 1607-18," *The American Historical Review* 76, no. 3 (1976): 600-08; Carville V. Earle, "Environment, Disease and Mortality in Early Virginia," in *The Chesapeake in the Seventeenth Century: Essays on Anglo-American Society*, ed. Thad W. Tate and David L. Ammerman (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1979), 102-03.

about the English and their place within Tsenacommacah and adds complexity to traditional conceptions of English-Indian relations in early Virginia.

Examinations of English runaways by authors such as James Axtell and Bernard Sheehan noted colonial leaders' concerns that their subordinates were leaving and running away to join the nearby Indians.³ In his work on colonial Virginia, Bernard Sheehan points out that English desertion, "became a problem almost immediately, and it continued to plague the Jamestown authorities until the massacre of 1622."⁴ Fleeing colonial settlement became such a problem that the colonial leaders made "running away" a capital offense in 1610.⁵ Contemporary historiography often assumes that running away was always a potential strategy for unsatisfied colonists seeking to reject the burden imposed by their colonial governments, at least until increasing warfare and racism made life among the Indians inconceivable for most colonists.

This chapter engages with these assumptions by looking at the receiving end of runaways, in particular the Algonquian peoples of the Chesapeake. By examining their motivations for accepting or rejecting English runaways, this chapter challenges the assumption that indigenous peoples were always and everywhere ready to accept any European runaways. This chapter uses recent scholarship about the ethnohistory of the Powhatans and other Chesapeake Algonquians to shed new light on well-mined English documents of the early

³ Bernard W. Sheehan, *Savagism and Civility : Indians and Englishmen in Colonial Virginia* (Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1980); James Axtell, "The White Indians," in *Natives and Newcomers: The Cultural Origins of North America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001).

⁴ Sheehan, *Savagism and Civility : Indians and Englishmen in Colonial Virginia*, 113.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 114. The term "runaway" is adopted here for clarity's sake. Records often mention deserters, renegades, runaways, or simply colonists who forsook the colony or sought un-approved succor among the Indians.

colonial period and presents an interpretation that stresses indigenous agency in early seventeenth-century Virginia.

Adopting Captives

Throughout the colonial era, people born to Europeans often died adopted members of Indigenous societies. Whether they were taken captive or ran away of their own will, Europeans found acceptance among their indigenous neighbors often enough that few scholars explore the cases in which European runaways were rebuffed. Perhaps the most well-known work on colonial-era European runaways is James Axtell's widely-cited article, "The White Indians." Axtell's work examines why Europeans often became "white Indians," while indigenous peoples seldom became "white." Axtell points out that the English colonials who became "white Indians" were most often women and children who elected to stay with their indigenous families after being captured and adopted into indigenous societies.⁶ Most indigenous societies had well-developed processes for adopting captive women and children that began with a scourging ceremony to remove their former identify and ended with a naming and adoption ceremony that marked the captives inclusion in their new society.⁷ Karen Kupperman examines the case of Anne Jackson, captured in 1622 during the Powhatan coup. In 1626 the Powhatans gave Jackson leave to go back to the English but by 1628 she had to be returned to England, presumably because if left to her own devices she would have remained among the Powhatans.⁸ The acculturation process for captives selected for adoption involved total immersion in Indian

⁶ James Axtell, "The White Indians of Colonial America," *William and Mary Quarterly* 31, no. 1 (1975): 58.

⁷ Ibid., 69-75; James F. Brooks, *Captives and Cousins: Slavery, Kinship and Community in the Southwest Borderlands* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 14-15.

⁸ Kupperman, *Indians and English : Facing Off in Early America*, 193-94.

culture. Captives did everything in Indian fashion, from adopting new clothes and hairstyles to engaging in ritual dancing and singing.⁹ Three rituals seem ubiquitous throughout eastern indigenous cultures - purging, cleansing, and dressing. New inductees into Indian society were forced to run a gauntlet and beaten. These beating were meant to excoriate the foreignness of the captive, as well as provided some catharsis for the families whose dead loved one the captive was usually replacing. Next, the captors treated the captives kindly and ritually bathed them to remove their old cultural attachments to white society. After bathing, new adoptees were clothed in the Indian fashion and thereafter treated as equal members of the community - often assuming the same social rank of the person they replaced.¹⁰ Axtell argued that the kindness and acceptance that followed the initiation ceremonies so relieved English captives who expected to be tortured and killed that it led them to accept their new life.¹¹ Even if ransomed, women who bore children in their new families usually elected to stay rather than return to an English society where they would assuredly encounter prejudice.¹²

Adult men were less-often adopted into indigenous societies during the colonial period. One letter from Virginia in 1623 reported that "there are none but women in Captiuitie with the Indians for the men that they tooke they putt them to death."¹³ The Powhatans had a long history of adopting women and children captured from rival indigenous groups to boost their own numbers. Indeed, William Strachey reported that the Powhatans, "seldom make wars for lands or

⁹ Axtell, "The White Indians," 199.

¹⁰ Ibid., 200-02.

¹¹ Ibid; *ibid.*, 203.

¹² Ibid., 194.

¹³ "Notes Taken from Letters Which Came from Virginia in the 'Abigail,' June 19, 1623," in *The Records of the Virginia Company*, ed. Susan Myra Kingsbury (Washington D.C.: US Government Printing Office, 1935), 238.

goodes, but for women and Children.”¹⁴ Men, if captured, would likely be held for ransom, traded for other prisoners, or ritually killed. However, adult runaways were not captives and were sometimes adopted into indigenous societies, though in small numbers. Axtell assumes this small number of voluntary runaways was due to an English sense of cultural superiority.¹⁵ While ethnocentrism certainly kept most English colonists in Jamestown, prior to 1622 English men often tried to run away to join nearby Algonquian groups. Indeed, it was Powhatan politics and economics, not English prohibitions or perceived cultural superiority, which prevented the widespread defection of English colonists into Tsenacommacah.

James Axtell’s account of the indigenous adoption process is a generalized gloss drawn from eighteenth-century accounts throughout the eastern woodlands. While the adoption rituals of the eighteenth century likely resemble those of the early seventeenth century, colonialism, population loss, and endemic warfare changed the nature of adoption over the course of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Because of depopulation brought on by war and disease, the need to replace warriors increased dramatically in the eighteenth century, and the rituals developed to meet those needs may not have been the same ones in place at first contact with Europeans. While eighteenth-century Indians throughout the East may have found reason to adopt well-seasoned frontiersmen and European traders into their societies, the Powhatans would have had little reason to adopt English indentured servants culled from the streets of London with no experience or skills as frontiersmen.

¹⁴ Strachey, *The Historie of Travell into Virginia Britania* (1612), 104; Rountree, *The Powhatan Indians of Virginia: Their Traditional Culture*, 121.

¹⁵ Axtell, "The White Indians of Colonial America," 56.

English Attitudes

Noted colonial writers such as Benjamin Franklin and Hector de Crevecoeur often remarked with concern that while Englishmen often chose to live among the Indians, even Indians educated in English schools seldom elected to adopt the English way of life.¹⁶ Modern authors often account for Franklin and de Crevecoeur's observation by noting the typically arrogant English attitude towards indigenous peoples throughout their colonial experience. While this may serve to explain the eighteenth-century situation, in the seventeenth century - English notions of racial and cultural superiority were not yet fully formed, especially among ordinary people. While race came to be an important category in colonial Virginia, it is important not to project the hard racial lines of the eighteenth and nineteenth century back onto the seventeenth century. T.H. Breen and Steven Innes point out the problems of generalizing about seventeenth-century white racial attitudes as though they arrived in the New World fully formed and homogenized across class lines.¹⁷ Breen and Innes highlight the necessity of careful periodization when asserting the role of racial and cultural prejudices. English ideas about the indigenous peoples of North America were not fixed or racialized in any systematic way and evolved throughout the colonial period.¹⁸ In early Virginia, the Powhatan coup of 1622 was the event that hardened English attitudes towards the Powhatans. Fear after the Powhatan attack of 1622, followed closely by economic success in tobacco production, marked the end of the runaway problem in Virginia. Though it is important to note that even during the First Powhatan

¹⁶ J. Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur, *Letters from and American Farmer and Sketches of Eighteenth-Century America* (New York: Penguin Books, 1986), 212-15; Axtell, "The White Indians," 190.

¹⁷ T.H. Breen and Stephen Innes, *"Myne Owne Ground" Race and Freedom on Virginia's Eastern Shore, 1640-1676* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 34.

¹⁸ David Read, *New World, Known World : Shaping Knowledge in Early Anglo-American Writing* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2005), 39; Richter, *Facing East from Indian Country*, 2.

War from 1609-1614, English runaways continued to prefer life among the Powhatans to life under draconian English leadership.

If English colonists preferred to live among the Powhatans, it reflected poorly on the English leadership because it served as a possible rejection of English, Christian civilization in favor of savagism.¹⁹ Runaways were sometimes intentionally omitted from colonial records because they reflected badly on the elites whose leadership they were rejecting. George Percy, who led the Virginia colony on at least three occasions during its first turbulent years, refused to acknowledge in his "Trew Relaycon" that colonists ran away to the Indians. When he described the depredations of the "starving times" in the winter of 1609-1610, Percy noted that the harsh treatment of the Indians by some of his lieutenants led the Indians to refuse to trade with them and reduced the colonists to eating rats and in some cases cannibalism, but not that any ran away.²⁰

Even if colonial elites did possess attitudes reflecting cultural superiority, a great many of the English colonists were decidedly non-elite soldiers, servants and indentured servants. The earliest English colonists in Jamestown were soldiers and gentlemen accompanied by their attendants who were in America on what they considered a military expedition. Most colonists did not travel to Virginia out of a desire to better themselves through industry. In the census of 1624-1625, out of a total population of 1,227, indentured servants made up 487 or nearly 40%.²¹ The total number of indentured servants in the Chesapeake is difficult to calculate. Estimates

¹⁹ Sheehan, *Savagism and Civility : Indians and Englishmen in Colonial Virginia*, 110.

²⁰ Nicholls, "George Percy's "Trew Relacyon": A Primary Source for the Jamestown Settlement," 248-49.

²¹ Abbot Emerson Smith, *Colonists in Bondage: White Servitude and Convict Labor in America, 1607-1776* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1947), 328.

based on colonial records and ship manifests suggest the number of indentured-servants hovered somewhere between 40-60% of the total white population in the 1620s-1630s, though fluctuating terms of indenture and the effects of disease in the “seasoning” of colonists make precise estimates difficult.²² A 1609 letter from the Council of Virginia to the Lord Mayor of London asked the Mayor to consider sending London’s homeless to Virginia. The phrasing of the request suggests many who arrived in Virginia may not have been given much of a choice.

if the inmate called before you and enjoined to remove shall allege he hath not place to remove unto, but must lye in the streets; and being offered to go this Journey, shall demand what may be there present maintenance, what may be their future hopes? It may please you to let them Knowe that for the present they shall have meat, drink, and clothing, with an house, orchard, and garden, for the meanest family, and a possession of lands to them and their posterity: one hundred acres for every man’s person that hath a trade or a body able to endure day labor.²³

As with most of the literature devoted to spurring investment in and travel to the English colonies, the Council’s request created an idyllic scene that wooed poor people with few prospects in England. A 1622 list of English emigrants still alive in Virginia suggested that of the 600 people who survived in 1621, 120 were not included because they “ran away and dyed in their passage.”²⁴

²² Christopher Tomlins, *Freedom Bound: Law, Labor, and Civic Identity in Colonizing English America, 1580-1865* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 586-87. Appendix III

²³ "The Council of Virginia to the Lord Mayor of London," in *The Genesis of the United States Boston*, ed. Alexander Brown (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Co., 1890), 252-53.

²⁴ It is unclear whether “dyed in their passage” means on the passage from England or in their passage to the Indians. "Mr. Wroth. Notes from Lists Showing Total Number of Emigrants to Virginia," in *Records of the Virginia Company*, ed. Susan Myra Kingsbury (Washington DC: Government Printing Office, 1933), 536.

Prior to the mid-1620s, Virginia held few charms for non-elite English colonists. The following description of life under the governorship of Sir Thomas Dale in September of 1611 points out the harsh realities of life in Virginia for most English colonists.

[29 September 1611], Sir Thomas Dale removed himself with three hundred persons for the building of Henrico Town, where being landed he oppressed his whole company with such extraordinary labors by day and watching by night as may seem incredible to the ears of any who had not the experimental trial thereof. Want of houses at first landing in the cold of winter and pinching hunger continually biting made those imposed labors most insufferable, and the best fruits and effects thereof to be no better than the slaughter of His Majesty's free subjects by starving, hanging, burning, breaking upon the wheel, and shooting to death. Some, more than half famished, running to the Indians to get relief, being again returned, were burnt to death. Some for stealing to satisfy their hunger were hanged, and one chained to a tree till he starved to death. Others attempting to run away in a barge and a shallop (all the boats that were then in the colony) and therein to adventure their lives for their native country, being discovered and prevented, were shot to death, hanged, and broken upon the wheel; besides continual whippings, extraordinary punishments working as slaves in irons for term of years – and that for petty offenses! – were daily executed.²⁵

Comparing one's life as a colonist working under John Smith or Thomas Dale to the supposed life of ease enjoyed by a Powhatan man, some English colonists found no contest.²⁶ Many of the ordinary colonists in Virginia abandoned the familiarity of their homes, tempted by outsized tales of quick riches in the New World. Disillusioned with life in a failing colony, abandoning the project must have seemed entirely reasonable. The rank and file soldiers and servants in Virginia lacked the singularity of purpose found among the Puritans of New England. The problem of

²⁵ Virginia, "A Brief Declaration," 900.

²⁶ Nicholas P. Canny, "The Permissive Frontier: Social Control in English Settlements in Ireland and Virginia, 1550-1650," in *The Westward Enterprise: English Activities in Ireland, the Atlantic, and America 1480-1650*, ed. K.R. Andrews, N.P Canny, and P.E.H. Hair (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1979), 32-33.

runaways was so widespread that news of it reached Spain. In 1612, the Spanish ambassador in London heard reports that as many as 50 of the English colonists in Virginia were either married or considering marrying Powhatan women and that “other Englishmen after being put among them [Powhatans] have become savages, and that the women whom they took out have also gone among the savages, and they have received and treated them well.”²⁷ Though the Spanish ambassador’s numbers were certainly over-inflated, his report demonstrates how serious the runaway problem was in early Virginia. Records show that the English leadership used draconian measures to solve the mounting runaway problem. George Percy wrote that under Sir. Thomas Dale’s leadership, several men,

being Idell and nott willeinge to take paynes did Runne away unto the Indyans many of them being taken ageine S[i]r Thomas in a moste severe mannor cawsed to be executed. Some he appointed to be hanged, some burned, some broken upon wheles others to be Staked and some to be shot to death all this extreme and crewel tortures he inflicted upon them To terrefy the reste for attempteing the Lyke.²⁸

As a result of Virginia’s reputation, rank-and-file English colonists were often happy to abandon English civilization for a life of perceived ease among their indigenous neighbors, even before the full horror of life in Jamestown revealed itself. When the English fleet of nine ships bringing Governor Gates to a foundering Jamestown wrecked off the Bermuda coast in 1609, many of the shipwrecked men embraced their new home and refused to work on building a ship

²⁷ "Copy of a Deciphered Letter of the Marquess of Flores to the King of Spain, Dated London, August, 1 1612. Received August 18 (8)," in *The Genesis of the United States*, ed. Alexander Brown (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, and Company, 1890 [1612]), 572; "The Permissive Frontier: Social Control in English Settlements in Ireland and Virginia, 1550-1650," 31-32.

²⁸ Nicholls, "George Percy's "Trew Relacyon": A Primary Source for the Jamestown Settlement," 261-62.

to travel the rest of the way. Asserting that the shipwreck “freed [them] from the government of any man” the colonists fled into the woods to live off the land rather than “be detained in that country [Virginia] by the authority of the commander thereof, and their whole life to serve the turns of the adventurers with their travails and labors.”²⁹ The defectors argued that God had provided the island of Bermuda to the shipwrecked crew and that it was “no breach of honesty, conscience, nor religion,” to reject the governor’s authority and provide for their own survival in Bermuda.³⁰ The situation in Bermuda in 1609 highlights how willing English colonists were to abandon their settlement. Indeed, simply hearing about conditions in Virginia was enough to convince some colonists to abandon the comforts of English civilization.

Powhatan Attitudes

While colonial leaders fretted about the possibility that their colonists might abandon them for the Indians, neither they nor most historians who have addressed the topic acknowledge that it was the Indians, not the Virginians, who controlled the situation in early Jamestown. As noted above, colonists sometimes ran away because they were hungry, and sometimes because they truly desired to throw off the shackles of English society and adopt those of the Indians. Unfortunately for runaway settlers, Indians were not interested in having new, useless, Englishmen in their chiefdoms. When one examines the historical record as informed by ethnohistorical work on the culture of the Virginia Algonquians, it becomes evident that all of the runaways who were eventually adopted served the larger strategic or personal interests of their indigenous hosts. In every instance they were either very young or provided some tangible

²⁹ Strachey, "A True Reportory," 406.

³⁰ Ibid., 406-07; Sheehan, *Savagism and Civility : Indians and Englishmen in Colonial Virginia*, 111.

benefit: information, stolen trade goods, or weapons. Moreover, the majority of adult male runaways eventually found themselves expelled, killed, or put to menial work by their Indian hosts once their hospitality and patience had run out.

In his discussion of English defectors in the seventeenth century, Bernard Sheehan points out that Indians proselytized their English captives and guests in an effort to entice English adoption of an indigenous lifestyle.³¹ While Sheehan was certainly correct that runaways reflected poorly on English leaders, and on English civilization in general, his evidence for forced conversion came from the very colonial leaders who were trying to come up with explanations for why settlers under their watch were defecting to Indian communities. Both Axtell and Sheehan usually assume that Indians in the colonial era were as interested in converting Europeans as the Europeans were in converting them. This assumption seems out of place in early Virginia. Powhatans insisting their rude and hapless English guests adopt an indigenous lifestyle was not the same as offering to adopt the English into their society. From the abortive English settlement of Roanoke in 1585 until the Second Powhatan War of 1622, the greater Chesapeake was a “native ground,” a place in which un-seasoned and un-skilled English colonists existed largely at the pleasure of their hosts.³² During this era of indigenous dominance, English runaways and defectors in early Virginia needed to prove their usefulness to their new hosts in order to have any chance of adoption. Far from offering a sense of English cultural superiority in early Virginia, Powhatan disinterest in adopting fully grown, unskilled, useless English men kept the numbers of successfully adopted runaways low among poor colonists.

³¹ *Savagism and Civility : Indians and Englishmen in Colonial Virginia*, 113.

³² DuVal, *The Native Ground : Indians and Colonists in the Heart of the Continent*.

Moreover, when English runaways *were* accepted into Powhatan villages, it was almost always because they offered a political or economic gain for the local werowance, not because of an indigenous cultural imperative to adopt anyone who needed looking after.

Trading and Adopting Boys

While the Chesapeake Algonquians were unlikely to adopt adult runaways, English boys were sometimes an exception. Because of their ability to learn foreign languages quickly, from first contact exchanging boys was the best way for both the English and Powhatans to learn the language and culture of their new neighbors. Exchanging young men achieved several goals for both sides. Young people served in part as exchange-students, as they were better able to learn their hosts' language and work as interpreters. Moreover, the boys were collateral. As a living show of good faith, exchange ensured good treatment by both sides. For the English, leaving young men with the Powhatans also meant fewer mouths to feed, a major consideration in the hungry, early days of Jamestown.

The most famous of these exchange students, Thomas Savage, was an English boy that Christopher Newport "gave" to Wahunsonacock at their first meeting in February 1608 and who would continue to play an important role as an interpreter until the 1630s.³³ Wahunsonacock accepted the boy graciously, "as his son," and Savage stayed with the Powhatan leader until 1610 when he returned to Jamestown. The Powhatan leader reciprocated by giving Newport his servant, Namontack. Both Newport and Wahunsonacock claimed the men they exchanged were

³³ Smith, "A True Relation [1608]," 69.

their sons, but both were lying. Nonetheless, both Savage and Namontack served as invaluable interpreters in the years to come.

Thomas Savage left Wahunsonacock sometime in 1610 by subterfuge; he claimed that he wanted to visit friends in Jamestown. Once granted leave, Savage never returned. When Savage met Wahunsonacock again in 1614, the paramount chief admonished him for not returning to Werowocomoco and reminded Savage that he was still his “child by way of Captain Newport.”³⁴ The paramount chief’s reaction to seeing Savage again suggests that the Powhatans meant the exchange to be permanent.

In many ways, Savage’s experience is similar to that of John Smith. As noted in the previous chapter, Wahunsonacock gave Smith a new name and invested him as a werowance in Tsenacommacah. While Smith likely saw his adoption and investiture as a temporary expedient to save his own life and gain vital food for his countrymen, Wahunsonacock saw the adoption as permanent. Recall that when Pocahontas met the presumed-dead Smith in London, she admonished him for abandoning his duties as a werowance of Tsenacommacah and reminded him of his oath to “be for ever and ever your Countrieman.”³⁵

While the Powhatans had a great deal of experience in making Powhatans out of non-Powhatan children, the notion of trading people temporarily was somewhat different. To be adopted into the Powhatan world was not usually reversible. When it came time for those

³⁴ Hamor, *A True Discourse of the Present State of Virginia*, 38; Smith, “The Generall Historie of Virginia, New-England, and the Summer Isles,” 248.

³⁵ “The Generall Historie of Virginia, New-England, and the Summer Isles,” 260-61; Townsend, *Pocahontas and the Powhatan Dilemma*, 156; Richter, *Facing East from Indian Country*, 76-77; Allen, *Pocahontas: Medicine Woman, Spy, Entrepreneur, Diplomat*, 292-94.

English boys who served as exchange students to return to Jamestown, the Powhatans were almost always hesitant to part with them. Even so, both sides expected their respective 'sons' to travel back and forth and serve as intermediaries. Namontack, the Powhatan boy Savage replaced, travelled at Captain Newport's side to England in 1608 where he remained for four months before returning to give his report to Wahunsonacock. On the return from his second voyage to England, Namontack died when his ship wrecked off Bermuda.³⁶ When Namontack did not return, Wahunsonacock inquired after him with concern, "how ye have dealt with him I know not."³⁷ The mamatanowick's concern suggests that while he thought of the exchange as permanent, he expected updates from his surrendered "son."

John Smith similarly traded Henry Spelman to Wahunsonacock's son, Parahunt, in October of 1609. (There is no evidence that anyone consulted the boy in the matter). Spelman soon returned to Jamestown but was sent back, this time to the paramount chief, with whom he stayed until late 1610. Fearing for his life, Spelman escaped and sought refuge among the Patowomecks. The Patowomecks used Spelman as a political pawn, trading him back to Jamestown in a bid for English military help in escaping the Powhatan paramouncy.³⁸

English colonists who spent a great deal of time among the Powhatans were often suspect upon their return. Even in 1624, many years after his time with the Powhatans, English colonists were suspicious of Thomas Savage as a potential traitor because of his position as a go-between

³⁶ Alden T. Vaughn, "Powhatan's Abroad: Virginia Indians in England," in *Envisioning an English Empire: Jamestown and the Making of the North Atlantic World*, ed. Robert Appelbaum and John Wood Sweet (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005), 51-54.

³⁷ Hamor, *A True Discourse of the Present State of Virginia*, 37-38.

³⁸ Spelman, "Relation of Virginia, 1609."

and interpreter.³⁹ The lure of life among the Indians was so tempting that the leaders of Jamestown suspected even John Smith of falling under its spell. After his capture by Opechancanough and subsequent release by Wahunsonacock, Smith became suspect among the English colony's leadership, who found it hard to believe that a grasping, ambitious man like Smith refused an offer of Indian royalty in exchange for his own life.⁴⁰ While there is no evidence that Wahunsonacock's offers of leadership within Tsenacommacah tempted Smith, his adversaries in Virginia still accused him of treachery and betraying the colony in exchange for promises of high status among the Powhatans. In part, these challenges to Smith's loyalty arose from his cavalier attitude towards his social betters in Jamestown, but they also reflected the real problem of runaways who left Jamestown throughout its early years to seek out a better life among the Powhatans.

Prior to 1622, English colonists left Jamestown in a steady trickle, though they were not always greeted with open arms when they left. While both sides treated the boys they exchanged as part of formal agreements well, rank-and-file runaways could not count on a warm reception. Edward Maria Wingfield recorded that as early as September of 1607, the Paspaheghs and other villages near to Jamestown scorned the colonists who ran to them and put them to work at menial tasks to earn their keep. Wingfield reported that after working among the Paspaheghs, the runaways "take little joye to trauell abroad without Pasportes."⁴¹ Likewise, Smith recorded that some runaways, expecting to live idly among the Indians, were put to work by their indigenous

³⁹ Rountree, *Pocahontas's People: The Powhatan Indians of Virginia through Four Centuries*, 79; Sheehan, *Savagism and Civility: Indians and Englishmen in Colonial Virginia*, 113.

⁴⁰ Horn, *A Land as God Made It: Jamestown and the Birth of America*, 111-13.

⁴¹ Wingfield, "A Discourse of Virginia Per Edward Maria Wingfield," 186.

hosts and came back “rather contented to labour at home.”⁴² Even as workers, some runaways embraced life among their indigenous hosts. In his *Generall History*, Smith mentions two cases of men who seem to have found some measure of satisfaction after running away. Robert Poole “in a manner turned heathen” after he ran away in 1619 and “a fugitive, called Robert Marcus,” lived for five years [1616-1621] among Tsenacommacah’s northern neighbors.⁴³ While life among the Indians was not the life of ease many runaways expected, for those who were accepted it seemed preferable to the alternative of dying in Jamestown.

William Parker: Suspicious Captive

One of the only cases of a captured and adopted English colonist prior to 1622 is that of William Parker. However, Parker’s case is problematic. The only account of Parker comes from Ralph Hamor’s *A True Discourse on the Present State of Virginia* (1615). The Powhatans captured Parker in 1611 while he was at work on Fort Henrico. After his abduction, Parker’s captors told the English that Parker died.⁴⁴ Hamor reported that in the three years between his abduction and his seemingly chance appearance at Orpax during Hamor’s visit, Parker had “growen of like both in complexion and habite to the Indians, that I onely knew him by his tongue to be an Englishman.”⁴⁵ Upon finding Parker alive, Hamor confronted Wahunsonacock and asked him to return the boy, threatening that if he was not returned Parker’s family would mount an attack to secure his release. Insulted and with “passion and discontentment,” Wahunsonacock responded “you have one of my daughters with you,[Pocahontas] and I am

⁴² Smith, “The Generall Historie of Virginia, New-England, and the Summer Isles,” 214-15.

⁴³ Ibid., 268, 89; Sheehan, *Savagism and Civility: Indians and Englishmen in Colonial Virginia*, 114.

⁴⁴ Hamor, *A True Discourse of the Present State of Virginia*, 44.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

therewith well content, but you can no sooner see or know of any Englishmans being with me, but you must have him away, or else breake peace and friendship.”⁴⁶ After making his objections known, Wahunsonacock agreed to allow Parker to return with Hamor in exchange for a long list of English trade goods.

The combination of Parker’s appearance after his reported death and Wahunsonacock’s angry and impassioned response to Hamor’s request for his return suggests that Parker had been fully adopted into Powhatan society. It is suspicious that Powhatans took Parker while he was working on Fort Henrico at the falls of the James River. Taken from a description of the conditions at Fort Henrico Hamor’s account demonstrates the harsh conditions English colonists faced in Virginia. It seems likely that Parker was not captured, but ran away from the fort to avoid the work, hunger, and torturous life at Fort Henrico. Moreover, when the Powhatans reported Parker’s death, they may have meant he died a ritual death, after which he was reborn as a Powhatan. What Parker offered the paramount chief in exchange for his adoption is unknown, though he might have provided his tools, weapons, or simply his knowledge about what the English were doing at Fort Henrico. Wahunsonacock’s anger at Parker’s leaving suggests the *mamanatowick* accepted him as a Powhatan. It is also important to note that Wahunsonacock did not allow Parker to leave without arranging to trade him for several valuable trade goods.

Useful Runaways and Thieves

Before the arrival of the English, Wahunsonacock controlled the flow of prestige goods in and out of Tsenacommacah. As noted in earlier chapters, this control legitimized his authority

⁴⁶ Ibid., 44-45.

as the ruler of several subordinate chiefdoms. By adopting John Smith and making him a werowance within Tsenacommacah, the paramount chief hoped to ensure his monopoly on English trade goods, particularly copper, and hoped to obtain European weapons with which to maintain and expand his paramountcy. Despite Smith's inclusion, Wahunsonacock was unable to control the English trade, or gain the weapons he desired. As English copper flowed into Tsenacommacah it eroded the spiritual and political power of the paramount chief. As it became clear that he could not acquire the goods he desired through trade, Wahunsonacock began to use discontented English runaways in attempts to steal what he could not get through trade.

While un-skilled English runaways were unlikely adoptees, men who could provide a service to Wahunsonacock had a better chance of finding a good life among the Powhatans. While most runaways were simply looking for food or relief from the realities of life in Jamestown, some went as far as working for Wahunsonacock as spies and thieves. The most well-known group of runaways in Early Virginia were a group of "Dutchmen" (likely Germans) who arrived with Captain Newport's second supply in September.⁴⁷ The men earned their keep in Tsenacommacah though stealing English tools and weapons for the Powhatans.

During the winter of 1608-1609, Wahunsonacock summoned John Smith to Werowocomoco. Earlier in the year, the mamanatowick cut off all trade with the English in an effort to force the leader of the English to the bargaining table, and it worked. By December the English were starving and John Smith came to Werowocomoco hat in hand. At their meeting, the Powhatan leader made it clear that he wanted "men to build him a house... a grindstone, 50

⁴⁷ The Dutchmen were brought along on the second supply along with other craftsmen from Poland to help develop exportable commodities, particularly glass, naval stores, and lumber.

swords, some peeces, [guns] a cock and a hen, [and] copper and beads” in exchange for his corn.⁴⁸ For Wahunsonacock, guns were the real goal. Smith, the leader of a small and starving settlement, wisely resisted the demand to trade away the only thing that gave him any leverage in Tsenacommacah. In an effort to buy some time, Smith agreed to Wahunsonacock’s demands, hoping that sending men to build the house would be enough to ensure delivery of the promised corn without the other promised items. Moreover, Smith admitted he was glad to have the house-builders eating with the Powhatans for the winter, as Smith had no food or use for them at the time.⁴⁹

John Smith sent the four “Dutchmen” to build Wahunsonacock’s English-style house.⁵⁰

It is unclear if the paramount chief convinced the Dutchmen to defect, or if they offered their services to him. Smith seems to blame the Dutchmen more than Wahunsonacock:

The next day he [Wahunsonacock] reviewed his building which hee little intended should proceed; for the Dutchmen finding his plenty, and knowing our want, and perceived his preparation to surprise us, little thinking wee could escape both him and famine, (to obtaine his favour) revealed to him as much as they knew of our estates and projects, and how to prevent them⁵¹

The Dutchmen quickly defected to Wahunsonacock’s cause and did all they could to assist him in acquiring English arms and trade goods. James Horn suggests the paramount chief offered them the same protection in Tsenacommacah that he offered Smith when he made him a

⁴⁸ Smith, "The Proceedings of the English Colonie in Virginia, [1606-1612]," 242.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 243-44.

⁵⁰ Ibid. Smith, "The Proceedings," 244; Most scholars assume Smith’s “Dutchmen” were actually Germans. His usage is retained here to avoid confusion.

⁵¹ Ibid. Smith, "The Proceedings," 246.

werowance, but without the elevation in rank.⁵² In any case, the Dutchmen revealed all they knew about the English settlement and plans for expansion.⁵³ Smith recorded that Wahunsonacock sent two of the Dutchmen, Adam and Francis, to Jamestown with the story that Smith, who was visiting the Powhatan at the time, needed more weapons and that the builders needed some more tools and clothing. “[B]y this colourable excuse, they obtained 6 or 7 more to their confederacie, such expert theefes, that presently furnished them with a great many swords, pike-heads, peeces, shot, powder and such like. They had Salvages at hand ready to carry it away.”⁵⁴ The mention of a “confederacie” suggests a large cabal of disaffected English conspirators helping the Dutchmen, perhaps in hopes of being allowed into Powhatan society. Indeed, in the following months, Smith recorded that the stores were being depleted but did not realize Englishmen were stealing the goods and giving them to the Indians. Alfred Cave points out that this behavior may have been a logical outgrowth of the misery experienced at Jamestown, particularly at times when relations were bad and Powhatans were actively picking-off any Englishmen found straggling outside the fort. With food scarce and Powhatan bowmen lurking in the woods, joining the Powhatans likely seemed the only way to stay alive.⁵⁵

Eventually the co-conspirators living at Jamestown began to wonder why they had not yet been asked to come and live with the defectors among the Powhatans. Smith reckoned the traitors’ primary reason for betraying their countrymen must have been the promise of living among the Powhatans, “free from those miseries that would happen [in] the colony.”⁵⁶ The

⁵² Horn, *A Land as God Made It: Jamestown and the Birth of America*, 123.

⁵³ "Imperfect Understandings: Rumor, Knowledge, and Uncertainty in Early Virginia," in *The Atlantic World and Virginia, 1550-1624*, ed. Peter C. Mancall (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 527-28.

⁵⁴ Smith, "The Proceedings of the English Colonie in Virginia, [1606-1612]," 250-51.

⁵⁵ Cave, *Lethal Encounters: Englishmen and Indians in Colonial Virginia*, 67.

⁵⁶ Smith, "The Proceedings of the English Colonie in Virginia, [1606-1612]," 259.

conspirators sent one of the Dutchmen who remained in Jamestown (there had originally been eight), disguised as an Indian, to inquire of Wahunsonacock when he would send for them. Smith got word of the disguised Dutchman and set out personally to capture him. Once captured, the German messenger claimed the whole thing was a misunderstanding brought on by the language barrier between himself and the English. When this argument failed to convince Smith, he argued that his countrymen were actually prisoners of Wahunsonacock's who were in danger of death if he did not help him. His pleas did not impress Smith, who had the messenger put in irons.⁵⁷

Now aware that there was indeed a plot in Jamestown, Smith was interested in getting the defected Dutchmen, and any accomplices, back to Jamestown to make an example of them. To this end, Smith captured the werowance of the nearby Paspaheghs and tried to exchange him for the Dutchmen. The Paspahegh werowance sent messengers begging Wahunsonacock to ransom him but they always came back with the response that the Dutchmen were in Werowocomoco of their own volition and did not wish to return and that Wahunsonacock had neither the time nor the inclination to drag them back in irons.⁵⁸ Eventually the captive werowance escaped and Smith was forced to try a new scheme to recover his runaway Dutchmen.

Smith next used William Volda, a colonist from Switzerland, as an emissary to try and extradite the Dutchmen and their companions. The conspiracy ran deep, however, and Volda proved also to be in league with the Powhatans. Smith wrote of Volda:

⁵⁷Ibid., 260. John Smith, Edward Arber, and A. G. Bradley, *Travels and Works of Captain John Smith : President of Virginia and Admiral of New England, 1580-1631*, A new ed., 2 vols. (Edinburgh: John Grant, 1910), 467-68.

⁵⁸Smith, "The Proceedings of the English Colonie in Virginia, [1606-1612]," 260-61.

For this wicked hypocrite, by the seeming hate he bore to the lewd condition of his cursed countrimen, having this opportunitie by his imploiment to regaine them, conveighed them everie thing they desired to effect their project to destroye the colonie. With much devotion they expected the Spanyard, to whom they intended to have done good service. But to begin with the first oportunitie, they seeing necessitie thus inforced us to disperse our selves; importuned Powhatan to lend them but his forces, and they would not onlie destroye our hogs, fire our towne, and betraie our Pinnas; but bring to his service and subjection the most part of our companies. With this plot they had acquainted manie discontents and manie were agreed to their divelish practice.⁵⁹

Smith's indictment of Volda highlights Tsenacommacah's place on the fringes of the Atlantic world. Volda defected to the Powhatans not because he particularly wanted to live with them, but because he expected a Spanish fleet to arrive any day and destroy the English settlement. Two of the malcontents Volda attempted to woo to his conspiracy, Thomas Dowse and Thomas Mallard, eventually betrayed the plan. Smith hoped to use Dowse and Mallard to lead the Dutchmen to a trap, but word of that plan also leaked out, so he decided on the somewhat less elegant plan of simply sending two men to stab the defectors in Werowocomoco. News of this plan reached Wahunsonacock, who sent word that "it was not his fault to detaine them [the Dutchmen], nor hinder his [Smith's] men from executing his command, nor did he, nor would he maintaine them, or anie to occasion his [Smith's] displeasure."⁶⁰ Wahunsonacock's response suggests he was not particularly interested in keeping the defectors in his care now that the stream of weapons and goods they facilitated was drying up. Clearly, the Dutchmen were not fully-adopted members of Tsenacommacah, but means to an end.

⁵⁹Ibid., 266.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 266-67.

Before Smith could press the matter any further, Captain Argall arrived from England. Argall's arrival seemed to have brought about abandonment of the goal of recapturing the runaways. It is unclear what happened to the Dutchmen. They are only mentioned once more, when Smith recounts all the complaints against him saying: "The dutch-men that he had appointed to bee stabd for their treacheries, swore he sent to poison them with rats baine."⁶¹ That they were able to complain about Smith suggests the Dutchmen survived whatever punishment Smith had planned for them and returned to live among the English at some point.

The Dutchmen and their confederates were perhaps the only runaways that truly defected, in the sense of changing sides with the express intent of betraying their original compatriots. They not only ran away, but actively planned Jamestown's destruction by giving the Indians valuable information and weapons. Smith suggested this had something to do with their being non-English. However, he admitted that many discontented English were in league with them. Smith wrote to encourage further colonization by the English and to justify his actions as leader. It is likely Smith used the Dutchmen as representative of the deserter/defector colonist to draw attention away from the fact that colonists of many backgrounds preferred life with Wahunsonacock to life with him. Owing to their foreignness, the Dutchmen seemed naturally less invested in the venture. An English reader would be less apt to wonder what could be so bad in Virginia as to drive men away from English civilization if those men were foreign. Running away was a reflection on both the country of Virginia and on the leadership of Smith. Thus, while it was probably necessary to include a few accounts of runaways in order for Smith to be

⁶¹ Ibid., 274.

taken seriously (after all everyone knew it happened because the colony's leaders complained about it so loudly), blaming defection on people who were already an 'other' made the betrayal a little easier to swallow.⁶²

Wahunsonacock allowed the Dutchmen to defect because they promised - and delivered - goods that he could not get himself. The Virginia Company and the Crown forbade the English to trade weapons to the Indians for obvious reasons. The potential to gain guns would have more than offset the cost of boarding the runaways. Moreover, Powhatan's eventual return of the Dutchmen demonstrates that he never fully accepted them into Powhatan society. They were a means to an end. Once their usefulness had ended, Wahunsonacock gave them up.⁶³

The Case of William White

The only Jamestown runaway to write a first-hand account was William White, a boy who defected almost immediately upon arrival in Virginia only to run back to the English some weeks later. White's original account has been lost, though John Smith, Samuel Purchas, and William Strachey all reference his report.⁶⁴ White ran away soon after arriving at Jamestown and found his way to the town of Quiyoughcohannock located north of Jamestown. None of the surviving accounts record White's motivation for leaving. This omission may indicate of the ubiquitous and unremarkable nature of runaways in early Virginia.

⁶² Canny, "The Permissive Frontier: Social Control in English Settlements in Ireland and Virginia, 1550-1650," 30; Karen Ordahl Kupperman, "English Perceptions of Treachery, 1583-1640: The Case of the American 'Savages,'" *The Historical Journal* 20, no. 2 (June, 1977): 282.

⁶³ Horn, "Imperfect Understandings: Rumor, Knowledge, and Uncertainty in Early Virginia," 528.

⁶⁴ Strachey, *The Historie of Travell into Virginia Britania* (1612), 98-100; William White, "Excerpt Published in Purchas His Pilgrimage: The Black Boys Ceremony," in *Jamestown Narratives: Eyewitness Accounts of the Virginia Colony: The First Decade 1607-1617*, ed. Edward Wright Haile (Champlain, VA: Roundhouse, 2007).

The Quiyoughcohannock's werowance, Choapock, like many subordinate werowances in Tsenacommacah hoped to exploit the nearby English in order to break with, or elevate, his status within Tsenacommacah.⁶⁵ Allowing William White to live among his people likely had more to do with what Choapock hoped to get from the English than with simply entertaining a young runaway. Because Choapock had to pay tribute to Wahunsonacock, he was interested in acquiring some of the trade goods the English had distributed on their explorations. Choapock could substitute English trade goods for his typical tributes of food and deerskins, making life easier for himself and the people of Quiyoughcohannock, particularly if English goods could be obtained by simply asking.⁶⁶ Choapock also inquired after English religion and guns, likely expecting that interest in the former might provide the latter.⁶⁷ Edward Wingfield recorded the coming of Choapock to trade with the English soon after White ran away. Choapock wanted to know when the English would be getting a new shipment of trade goods and promised to bring some corn to trade when his crop matured. The English gave him a red waistcoat and Wingfield recorded that Choapock later returned to trade as he said he would.⁶⁸

For White, life with Choapock was probably better than living at Jamestown, but it was not the idyll he expected. It seems notable that Choapock did not mention that he was harboring a runaway when he came to trade. Moreover, the English must not have known that White was living with Choapock or they would have certainly asked for him back. In *A Discourse of Virginia*, Wingfield noted that right after the account of Choapock, "The [fifth] of September,

⁶⁵ Rice, "Escape from Tsenacommacah: Chesapeake Algonquians and the Powhatan Menace," 124.

⁶⁶ Benjamin Woolley, *Savage Kingdom : The True Story of Jamestown, 1607, and the Settlement of America*, 1st ed. (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2007), 97; Richter, "Tsenacommacah and the Atlantic World," 47-48.

⁶⁷ White, "Excerpt Published in Purchas His Pilgrimage: The Black Boys Ceremony," 141.

⁶⁸ Edward Maria Wingfield, "A Discourse of Virginia Per Edward Maria Wingfield," *ibid.*, 187.

Paspapeigh sent us a boy that was run from us. This was the first assurance of this peace with us....The rest of the werroyances do likewise send our men runagates to us home again, using them well during their being with them.”⁶⁹ Wingfield’s note suggests the Powhatans knew the English wanted their runaways returned. Moreover, it suggests that werowances harbored English runaways with the intention of using them to obtain trade goods and favor with the English, not because they were interested in adopting English malcontents. Here again, there is evidence that Powhatan did not welcome runaways without a plan to use them. However, if as Wingfield says the Powhatans sent some runaways back to the English, why was William White allowed to stay with Choapock? Perhaps he allowed White to stay because he provided Choapock with valuable information about English shipments and trade goods.

The Quiyoughcohannocks allowed White to witness several Powhatan ceremonies in an attempt to impress the power of Tsenacommacah upon the English. White’s accounts of two ceremonies he witnessed while among the Quiyoughcohannocks have survived, probably because they seemed so fantastic to the English.⁷⁰ White witnessed a huskinaw or “black boy ceremony” first. A rite of passage for Powhatan boys, White believed the huskinaw was a child sacrifice probably because the Quiyoughcohannocks prevented him from witnessing the entire ceremony.⁷¹ While he was allowed the witness the first part of the ceremony in which boys

⁶⁹ Ibid., 186.

⁷⁰ The relevant parts of William White’s account published by Purchas are culled and presented in: William White, “Excerpt published in *Purchas His Pilgrimage: The Black Boys Ceremony*,” in *Jamestown Narratives: Eyewitness Accounts of the Virginia Colony: The First Decade 1607-1617*, ed. Edward Wright Haile (Champlain, VA: Roundhouse, 2007), 138-141.

⁷¹ Gleach describes the Huskinaw as a “vision quest,” while Barbour believes those who recorded it embellished White’s account. For a thorough description of the ceremony and its significance in Powhatan culture see: Gleach, *Powhatan's World and Colonial Virginia: A Conflict of Cultures*, 38-39; Philip L. Barbour, “The Riddle of the Powhatan “Black Boyes”,” *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 88, no. 2 (April 1980); Williamson, *Powhatan Lords of Life and Death: Command and Consent in Seventeenth-Century Virginia*, 206-09.

painted white were ritually killed, the Quiyoughcohannocks did not allow White to witness the ceremonial resurrection of the boys. After their resurrection, the boys left their families to receive visions while living in the wilderness, only returning several months later as men. While it is unclear why the local werowance sent White away at the end of the ceremony, his status as an outsider may have precluded him from witnessing the conclusion of such an important ceremony. Women were excluded from the ceremony because they did not interact with the spiritual world in the same way as men.⁷² Likewise, White's removal from the ceremony may indicate that the Quiyoughcohannocks thought of him as an outsider and a political tool, not a man in the Powhatan sense. The Quiyoughcohannocks only allowed White to stay with them because he provided information about the English, acted as an interpreter, and helped acquire trade goods. Indeed, it seems remarkable that the Quiyoughcohannocks allowed White to witness any of the huskinaw ritual. By allowing White to witness only the most violent aspects of the huskinaw, the Quiyoughcohannock werowance may have intended to intimidate and impress the English visitor for political gain. Certainly, White only saw what his hosts wanted him to see.

In November or December of 1607 White witnessed a second ceremony in which the entire town of Quiyoughcohannock packed up and moved to a more remote site to engage in deer hunting. White described the camp as extremely cold, but noted that the Indians did not seem to notice as their red body paint protected them.⁷³ Many other Indians joined the group, including Powhatan's brother and outside-chief Opechancanough. Later in December, a group of Indian men came to Opechancanough's tent dragging a captured Englishman, George Casson.

⁷² *Powhatan Lords of Life and Death: Command and Consent in Seventeenth-Century Virginia*, 209.

⁷³ Smith, "A Map of Virginia [1612]," 161.

Opechancanough used White as an interpreter to question Casson. Casson claimed he had been left alone on a boat during an exploratory trip with Captain John Smith. While waiting, Casson had been enticed onto land by some Powhatan women and captured. Casson's account failed to impress Opechancanough, who killed the Englishman in front of the assembled Indians and William White, who later recounted the grisly execution.⁷⁴ Opechancanough had Casson tied to a tree and cut off his joints with mussel shells or strong reeds and cast them into a fire. Next, he removed skin of his head and face and split his belly, spilling his entrails. The assembled Powhatans then ignited what remained of Casson and the tree supporting him. Strachey records this story, noting that typically the Indians "only punish and not put to death" offenders of the law by beating them severely.⁷⁵ Opechancanough may have executed Casson with such theatricality because he wanted White to witness and report what happened to Englishmen who assaulted Indian women.⁷⁶ Whatever the reason, it seems to have removed White's desire to live among the Powhatans and he returned to Jamestown, where he remained until at least 1621.⁷⁷

White's story demonstrates one of the recurring themes of this analysis. Powhatans often had ulterior and complex motives for allowing English runaways to settle with them. In White's case it was to gather information and to act as a messenger and interpreter. White ran away to live with the Quiyoughcohannock, who kept and trained him as an interpreter until Opechancanough sent him back to the English. Only the political acumen of White's patron

⁷⁴ White, "Excerpt Published in Purchas His Pilgrimage: The Black Boys Ceremony," 141.

⁷⁵ Smith confirms that this was a fairly unique punishment in his *Map of Virginia* stating that, "Their ordinary correction is to beate [offenders] with cudgels." Smith, "A Map of Virginia." 175.

⁷⁶ Woolley, *Savage Kingdom : The True Story of Jamestown, 1607, and the Settlement of America*, 114-15.

⁷⁷ Philip L. Barbour, *The Three Worlds of Captain John Smith* (Boston,: Houghton Mifflin, 1964), 146, 436.

werowance, who thought the boy might be useful in negotiating with the English, kept him alive. Even White's return served the purposes of Opechancanough and the Powhatans. White's fortunes were tied more to Powhatan political maneuvering than to Powhatan hospitality or a cultural imperative to include Englishmen in their society.

Conclusion

English runaways had several reasons to run away: hunger, curiosity, and lust, as well as fear of their own leadership, death by a Powhatan arrow, or death by Spanish cannon. As examples of people who were willing to abandon their society and culture for that of the Powhatans, runaways are inherently interesting. However, most studies of runaways assume there was always somewhere to run. The examples of people like John Smith, who Wahunsonacock made a werowance of Tsenacommacah, seem to lend credence to the idea that English colonists were welcomed and even exalted in Powhatan society. However, a closer look at less historically aggrandized cases of English runaways reveals they often mistook Powhatan hospitality for acceptance and adoption.

Life among the Powhatans was certainly alluring when compared with the life of non-elite colonists in early Jamestown. Because runaways typically left no records and their departure reflected poorly on the English leadership, runaways show up only rarely in the historical record. The examples of William White, the defected Dutchmen, and William Parker are some of the only surviving accounts of what must have been a much larger community English of runaways in early Virginia. Unlike John Smith, who never seriously considered living among the Powhatans, the cultural and religious ethnocentrism of the English leadership was not so well ingrained in the non-elite colonists, at least not enough to prevent them from considering

Powhatan life. Indeed, it was the Powhatan's rejection that kept such colonists from defecting *en masse*. To reduce the desire to defect to a simple function of hunger or despair is to deny the complex and fluid state of English colonialism in the seventeenth century. Indeed, the actions of the Powhatans and their neighbors, as much as the English themselves, shaped English attitudes regarding their indigenous neighbors. Though defectors, runaways, and converts were seldom mentioned in the historical record, they had a profound impact on both the history of Anglo-Indian relations, as well as the English colonial mindset.

Conclusion

By the time the English arrived in 1607, Wahunsonacock had built Tsenacommacah into an expansive paramountcy of over 14,000 people.¹ Surrounded by indigenous rivals, the paramount chief maintained his authority through violence and control over prestige goods as well as the spiritual power that each represented. Having entertained several short-term European visitors, Wahunsonacock and Opechancanough weighed their options and chose to control the English colonists who invaded their new domain in 1607. Their decision to engage, rather than expel the English or withdraw from them entirely, was based on Wahunsonacock's assessment of the indigenous political situation within and surrounding Tsenacommacah. Certainly, the paramount chief was interested in acquiring English prestige goods such as copper, but preventing those goods from falling into the hands of his indigenous rivals pushed the Powhatan mamanatowick to incorporate the English into his paramountcy. Unfortunately for Wahunsonacock, English copper flooded into Tsenacommacah at such an uncontrollable rate that it lost much of its power as a prestige good. With the decline of copper and English violence escalating, the mamanatowick turned his attention to English guns to hold his paramountcy together. Stuck between an encroaching Atlantic world of goods and a native ground populated by indigenous rivals and rebellious districts, Wahunsonacock needed to keep the English contained and monopolize their trade.

Thus, Wahunsonacock's goal in the First Anglo-Powhatan War was not to exterminate the English, but to force them to act as an entrepôt of trade goods. Wahunsonacock and Opechancanough were shrewd leaders who were experienced in dealing with Europeans. They

¹ Rountree, *The Powhatan Indians of Virginia: Their Traditional Culture*, 15.

used a combination of violence, diplomacy, gift-giving, and even disaffected English runaways to extract what they needed from the English at Jamestown. Confident that he could control the English, the Powhatan paramount chief made a strategic choice and allowed them to stay in Tsenacommacah. Wahunsonacock's gambit might have worked. However, a surge of English colonists after the importation of tobacco in 1612 and an English leadership willing to tolerate staggering deaths among their own people combined to overwhelm Tsenacommacah by the mid-seventeenth century.

Future Research

This work is poised to further explore how Tsenacommacah's reaction to the English presence in Jamestown impacted the course of English colonialism. The confrontations between the Powhatan paramountcy and the English in Virginia fundamentally influenced the trajectory of English colonialism. Had the English not settled on the edge of a burgeoning paramountcy, English attitudes concerning race, gender, and class might have developed differently. Further development of this line of thought might also engage with the work of historians Karen Kupperman and Michael Zuckerman, who argue that English colonial identity was often formed on the ground in North America.² Similarly, historian Elizabeth Mancke writes, "overseas empires were products of transatlantic negotiations and authority constructed on the colonial margins rather than transplanted from Europe."³ Runaways cast doubt on the model of English

² Michael Zuckerman, "Identity in British America: Unease in Eden," in *Colonial Identity in the Atlantic World, 1500-1800*, ed. Nicholas P. Canny and Anthony Pagden (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1987); Kupperman, *Indians and English : Facing Off in Early America*; *Settling with the Indians : The Meeting of English and Indian Cultures in America, 1580-1640* (London: J.M. Dent, 1980).

³ Elizabeth Mancke, "Negotiating an Empire: Britain and Its Overseas Peripheries, C. 1550-1780," in *Negotiated Empires: Centers and Peripheries in the America, 1500-1820*, ed. Christine Daniels and Michael V. Kennedy (New York: Routledge, 2002), 236.

colonialism described by historians such as Nicholas Canny, who suggests that the English experiences in Ireland formed the template for English colonialism in North America.⁴ While Canny is correct that the leaders of Jamestown came expecting conquest and thus dismissed Indians, it seems that the diverse, rank-and-file colonists, when confronted with the realities of life in America, did not necessarily share their leaders' models of colonialism. Indeed, their perceptions were impacted more by their interactions with the Powhatan paramountcy and the natural world of the Chesapeake than imported ideas about Indians. The racial, ethnic, and cultural barriers that historians tend to see between European and indigenous peoples emerged in part because the English in the Chesapeake settled on the edges of such a powerful paramountcy.

This work attempts to rationalize Powhatan engagement with English colonialism by situating that engagement in an interconnected and politically complex native ground. Settled within a less-complex indigenous polity, the English might have faced a different reception. Future research will demonstrate the importance of complex indigenous polities in the success of English colonial efforts in the Americas. For example, the English colony at Sagadahoc in Maine lasted only one winter. Historians of colonial Maine often attribute the abandonment of Sagadahoc to a combination of internal problems, not Indian hostility. Contemporary sources noted several domestic causes for failure: fire destroyed the colony's storehouse, the colony's leader George Popham died and his successor Raleigh Gilbert was eager to leave America after learning he had inherited his father's estate.⁵ However, Sagadahoc's struggles were similar to those of Jamestown that it is difficult to tell the sources apart. It seems that the difference

⁴ Canny, "The Permissive Frontier: Social Control in English Settlements in Ireland and Virginia, 1550-1650."

⁵ Alfred A. Cave, "Why Was the Sagadahoc Colony Abandoned? An Evaluation of the Evidence," *The New England Quarterly* 68, no. 4 (Dec. 1995): 626-28.

between success and failure had more to do with the engagement of indigenous neighbors than colonial planners cared to admit. While internal problems certainly played a role, the failure of the English to establish trade relations with the nearby Eastern Abenaki populations provided the biggest push towards the abandonment of the settlement. In his 1995 re-evaluation of the evidence surrounding the abandonment of Maine in 1608, Alfred Cave argues that while Maine historians are probably correct that overt Indian hostility played little role in removing the English at Sagadahoc, the indigenous inhabitants of Maine were important elements in removing the English. Unlike in Virginia, the Indians did not need to ally with the English. The colony in Maine was in the same precarious position as the colony in Virginia, but Virginia survived because Wahunsonacock wanted to keep it alive as an entrepôt for prestige goods and weapons. In Maine, the Abenaki had other avenues for European trade goods and thus no reason to keep the English around when they started acting like Englishmen. Even so, the Maine Indians did not need to mount a large-scale attack to drive out the English; simply refusing trade was enough to force the fledgling colony to abandon their toehold in Maine.⁶ The English at Sagadahoc were unlucky enough to settle not on the edge of a burgeoning indigenous paramountcy eager for trade, but near a small indigenous population who did not need the English interlopers as potential trading partners and so simply turned their backs on the dismissive and acquisitive English.

⁶ Ibid., 626; Neal Salisbury, *Manitou and Providence: Indians, Europeans, and the Making of New England, 1500-1634* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 81-82, 111-18.

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